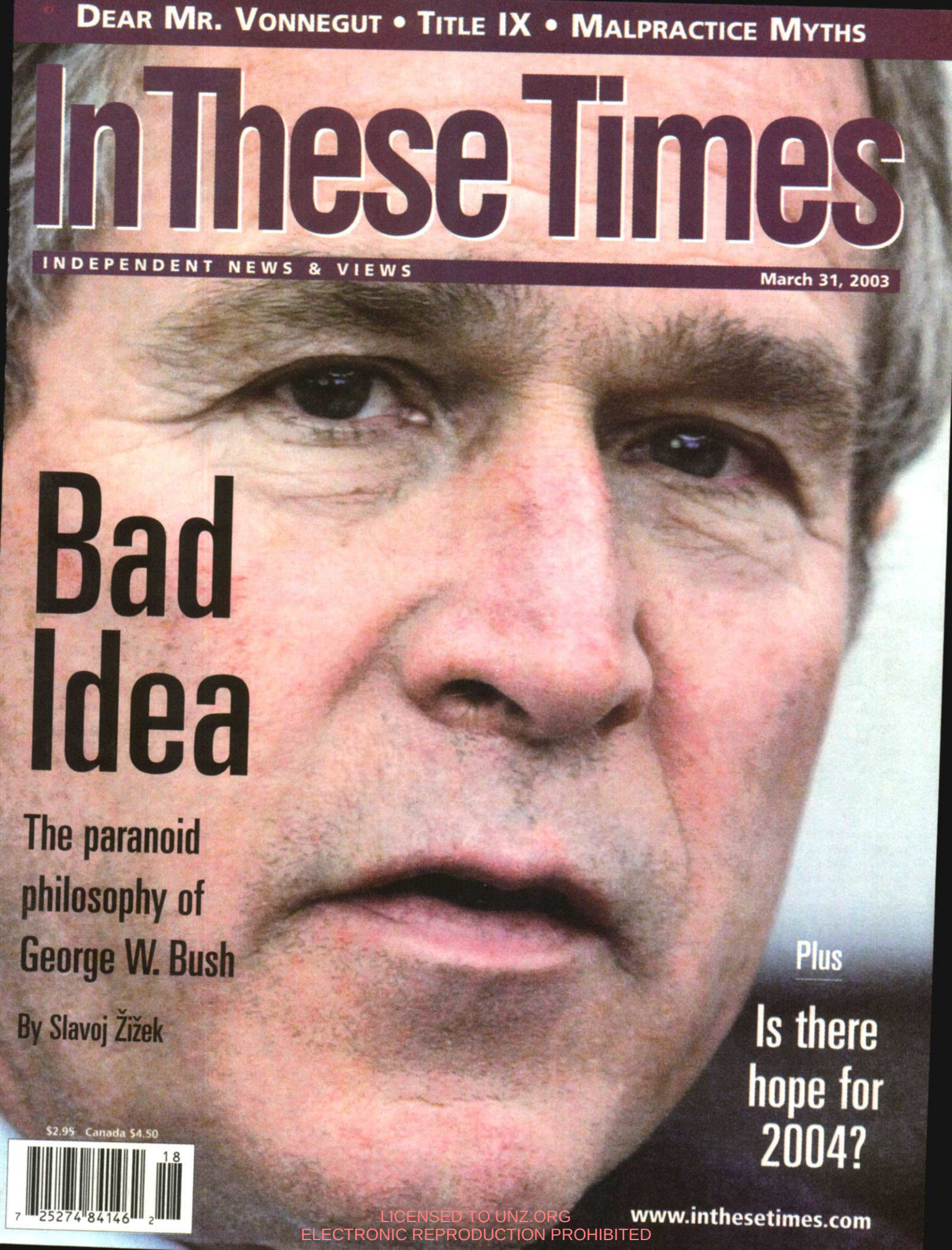
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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

March 31, 2003



Bad Idea

The paranoid philosophy of George W. Bush

By Slavoj Žižek

Plus

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Editorial

Total Information Control

Size of protest—it's like deciding, well, I'm going to decide policy based upon a focus group," said George W. Bush, trying to dismiss the millions of demonstrators who took to the streets on February 15 to protest the administration's plans for war with Iraq. Bush said what he did, no doubt, because White House strategist Karl Rove had discovered through focus groups that Americans view "focus groups" as a negative.

The Defense Department, at the request of the Senate, has put the price tag on war with Iraq at $95 billion—and 99 cents. But the Pentagon has yet to release an estimate of the human cost, and the Senate hasn't requested one. (Could it be that "conflagrating innocent civilians" is another focus-group negative?)

Sen. Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia) chided his colleagues: "On what is possibly the eve of horrific infliction of death and destruction on the population of the nation of Iraq—a population, I might add, of which over 50 percent is under age 15—this chamber is silent."

For damage estimates, one has to look to the United Nations, which has been planning relief efforts. ("Preparing for eventualities should hostilities occur," is how they tactfully put it.) A U.N. study titled "Strictly Confidential—Likely Humanitarian Scenarios" estimates 500,000 Iraqi civilians will receive "traumatic injuries" (100,000 direct and 400,000 indirect) as a result of the war. In addition, according to the United Nations, the 2 million "severely and moderately wasted under-5 children" of Iraq would be put in danger if what meager sustenance they currently receive is interrupted.

Should the United States wage the "total war" that is predicted, those estimates could well be low. Adam Mersereau, a one-time Marine, writing for *National Review Online*, defined total war like this:

> The kind of warfare that not only destroys the enemy's military forces, but also brings the enemy society to an extremely personal point of decision, so that they are willing to accept a reversal of the cultural trends that spawned the war in the first place. A total war strategy does not have to include the intentional targeting of civilians, but the sparing of civilian lives cannot be its first priority. ... The purpose of total war is to permanently force your will onto another people group. Limited war pits combatants against combatants, while total war pits nation against nation, and even culture against culture.

That may not be a pretty sight. However, the Defense Department has plans to totally control what the American people will see. Under the Pentagon's press rules, "embedded" reporters will receive guided tours of the battlefield by U.S. military personnel. According to a reporting contract leaked to *Editor & Publisher*, to get "embedded" the reporters must sign "ground rules" that let the Defense Department limit what they report and see. For example, the contract states "Embedded media are not authorized use of their own vehicle while traveling in an embedded status."

On the home front, the media are not so much "embedded" as in bed with the Bush administration. A *USA Today* headline proclaimed the feel-good news, "Bush predicts postwar stability." Viacom/CBS, the nation's second-largest media company, refused to let the anti-war coalition MoveOn rent billboard space. Further, Viacom/CBS warned Grammy presenters and nominees that it would cut off the microphones of any singer who ad-libs anti-war opinions. On Oscar night, will Hollywood stars be similarly corralled—and cowed—by Disney/ABC?

On the home front, the media are not as much "embedded" as in bed with the Bush administration

Not if those stars know what's good for them. A new study by psychologists at the University of Sussex in England found that being active in political campaigns, strikes and demonstrations can help people overcome stress, pain, anxiety and depression. Researcher John Drury put it this way: "The take-home message from this research therefore might be that people should get more involved in campaigns, struggles and social movements, not only in the wider interest of social change but also for their own personal good."

—Joel Bleifuss

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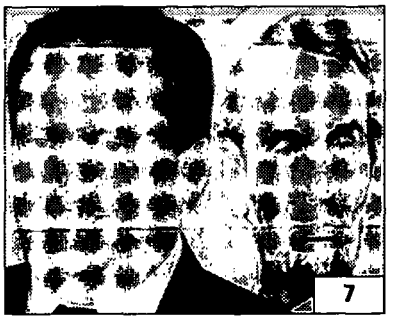
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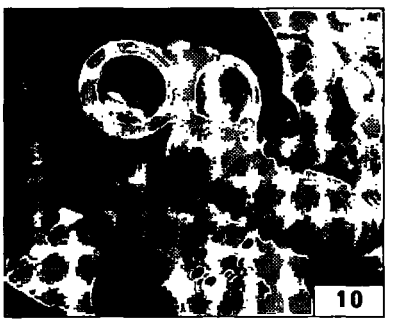
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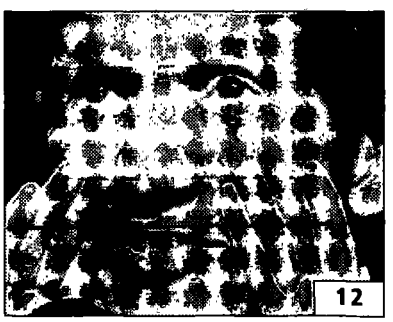
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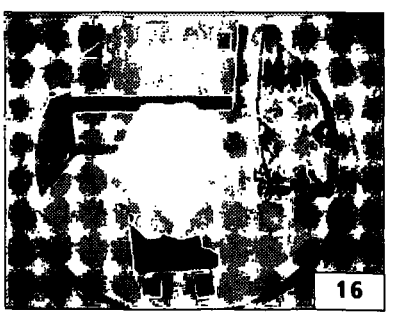
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Workers Unite

Unions around the world oppose the drive for war

By David Bacon

After a weekend of anti-war demonstrations involving more than 10 million people worldwide, opposition to invading Iraq in many countries is hardly in question. But U.S. military action may have political costs that go far beyond rising unpopularity.

On February 17, more than 200 unions from five continents, representing 130 million members, agreed on a joint statement rejecting a war in Iraq. That declaration questions the U.S. rationale, saying no convincing link exists between the terrorist attacks of September 11 and Iraq's Saddam Hussein, nor is there evidence for immediate threats from weapons of mass destruction.

Unions signing the statement point out that such a war would be fought overwhelmingly by the sons and daughters of workers, and they assert that war hysteria is being used as a pretext for attacks on labor and to mask the effects of a sinking economy. The appeal ends by calling on labor to organize opposition in every country.



San Francisco SEIU workers join a February 15 march against war in Iraq.

Such an appeal is unprecedented. Most U.S. unions supported the Vietnam War, and while unions in other countries voiced opposition, there was no common front, much less one organized by U.S. labor. The February 17 appeal was initiated by U.S. Labor Against the War, a growing coalition including at least six major national unions—AFSCME, American Postal Workers, SEIU, United Farm Workers, United Electrical Workers and Communications Workers—three state labor federations, and many locals and labor councils.

In Britain, where opposition is sharpest, unions have squared off against the Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, which supports an Iraq invasion. On January 9, two train engineers refused to climb into the cab of a locomotive and pull a train from Glasgow to the largest weapons storehouse in NATO, the Glen Douglas military base on Scotland's western coast.

The incident electrified British workers. Not only were the two supported by their union, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, but the union's general secretary warned February 19 that such actions would multiply in the event of war.

This isn't an idle threat. Already, five of Britain's largest and most strategically placed unions have openly defied Blair, including railway workers and firefighters. Some call for Blair's ouster, even at the cost of the Labour Party's grip on power.

Other unions are following suit. In Italy, where more than 3 million people turned out in the streets of Rome the weekend of February 15 (the largest demonstration since the end of World War II), the left-wing General Confederation of Italian Workers made a similar threat. On February 20, the union's executive council declared its intention of calling a general strike in the event of hostilities. Said Enzo Bernardo, director of the GCIL's International Department: "We know terrorism in our country, and this war has nothing to do with resolving it. Our government does not speak for the Italian people."

In Pakistan, the United States depends on the increasingly unpopular regime of President Pervez Musharraf to support its continuing hunt for Taliban and al-Qaeda militants, and mass labor demonstrations there against an Iraq war would create huge political problems. Yet joining in the February declaration were the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions and the All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation, which declared that the objective of intervention in Iraq was the pursuit of oil.

Among supporters of the labor declaration, sentiment is sharpest in those countries where governments have aligned themselves with the Bush administration. The trade union federation of Australia, where Prime Minister John Howard has been one of Bush's most vociferous supporters, declared it was "ashamed" of Howard's actions. "He has no mandate from our people," declared Sharron Burrows, the federation's president.

After 150,000 people turned out in Montreal's march, Canadian public employees and autoworkers announced they would step up pressure on Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

Many anti-war labor federations represent a much greater percentage of workers in their countries than do unions in the United States and can exact a price for political support. In the German elections, unions supported Gerhard Schröder in his successful re-election bid, when he campaigned against Bush's military policy. Schröder's victory indicates that other governments may also survive or fall based on their support for war. In some of those countries, like Britain and Italy, support for Bush may cost those governments their hold on power. ■

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Campus Coalition

Students team up to oppose the war

By Naureen Shah

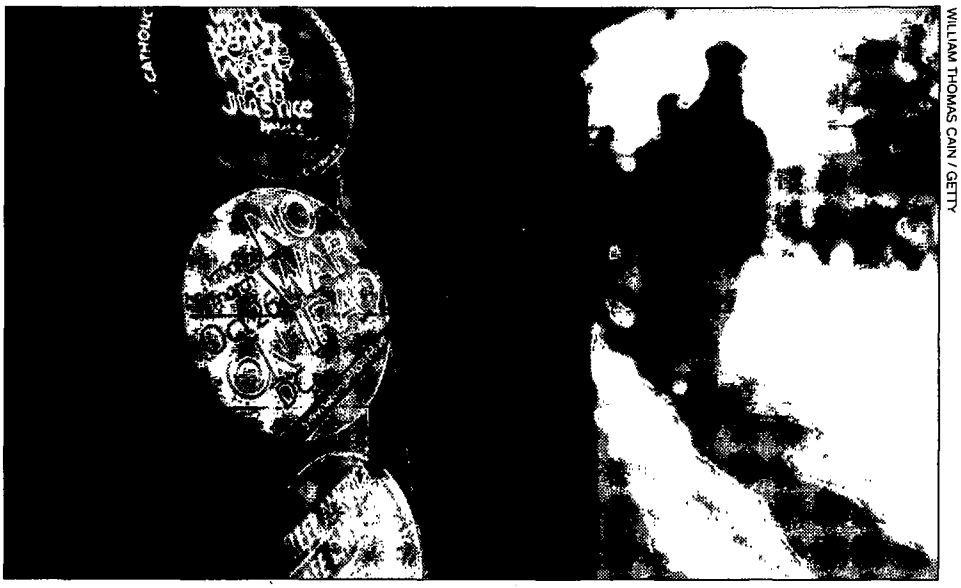
CHICAGO—Where are the students? It's a question many seasoned anti-war activists have likely been asking in recent months, and a diverse new generation of campus organizers is beginning to answer. The National Youth and Student Peace Coalition (NYSPC) and the Campus Anti-War Network (CAN) are leading efforts to amass students from across the nation in actions planned for March and April.

From February 21 to 23, CAN brought more than 300 students from more than 100 universities and high schools together to discuss the future of the campus movement, which until recently has been fragmented and, some say, insignificant. While NYSPC has issued a call for a national day of student strikes on March 5 and created a coalition of several pre-existing national campus groups, CAN has focused its efforts on bolstering the broad, non-ideological base of the new movement.

Energized by the February 15 nationwide protests, the conference voted to pursue its own student-led national rally and march on April 5. It also urged students to participate in the March 5 national student walkout. "We want a real say in what we do, and we want to take back the grassroots anti-war movement," Berkeley junior Michael Smith said, urging the conference to initiate its own actions and not simply join those of larger, more established groups.

Some delegates at the conference were skeptical of CAN's ability to organize independently of mammoth anti-war organizations like International ANSWER and United For Peace and Justice (which organized the U.S. wing of the February 15 marches). But most, from schools large and small, seemed intent on jump-starting the campus movement independently of such large coalition groups.

Though national groups like the Campus Greens and Muslim Students Association have coordinated joint anti-war actions through individual chapters, CAN is the first to bring together student anti-war groups from around the nation.



WILLIAM THOMAS CAIN / GETTY

At a peace rally at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia in February.

In making decisions entirely through consensus, the conference showed the ability of a diverse group of students—diverse not only in geography, but also race, class and ideology—to organize collectively and with decisiveness.

Debate hinted at a possible schism between activists seeking a broad, non-ideological basis for the campus movement and those involved in pre-existing organizations. But at the CAN conference, the former appeared to prevail. Delegates overwhelmingly saw a more democratic focus as an important divergence from the national anti-war movement, which some criticized as being dominated by top-down organizational methods and sectarian groups.

Though campuses have yet to rattle universities with their own large-scale war protests, more than 29 student governments have passed resolutions condemning military action in Iraq, and both New York University and the University of Texas organized walkouts in the thousands this winter. Still, such demonstrations are exceptions. The problem may be translating widespread verbal opposition to the war into prolonged student action against it.

NYSPC estimates that more than 200 campuses will be involved in the March 5 student walkouts, but some anti-war groups do not have the campus presence to take part effectively in such a radical demonstration. "We could have a walkout, and 20 people would walk out," says Columbia University organizer Laura Durkay, who is organizing a March 5 panel discussion instead.

The struggle against war is in its infancy at many schools. At Southern Methodist University in Dallas, campus organizing began only recently and was initiated by faculty. "This is the buckle of the Bible Belt," says SMU senior Christine Lee. "The faculty are the liberal ones, and the students are uninformed."

At Rutgers University in New Jersey, anti-war organizers will enjoy the sanction of their university president in a March 6 walkout, when they'll march on the state capitol protesting cuts in the school's budget. Activists say the cuts are a "war tax"—a direct result of the trade-off between military spending and federal aid to the states and education.

Budgets cuts and the economic impact of the war in Iraq may catalyze this student movement just as the draft prompted mass demonstrations in the '60s. As the campus movement gains the confidence to chant its own demands—money for schools, not war—and not just those of the broader movement, its voice may grow more significant.

"We don't have paid organizers. We don't have huge banners. And it's a lot harder for us to get permits," Brown University student Shuan Joseph told fellow activists at the conference. "But if we could say to our campuses, 'This is something we organized ourselves,' we'd get a response. And this could be something qualitatively different." ■

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Artless Budgeting

Cultural funding evaporates at state level

By Ben Winters

The arts community in New Jersey was under no illusions that the 2004 fiscal year would be a pleasant one. Currently laboring under a staggering $5 billion budget deficit, New Jersey, like nearly every state in the union, faces drastic belt-tightening in the upcoming funding cycle.

But no one was expecting what they got when Gov. James McGreevey, a Democrat, unveiled his proposed budget last month: no funds at all for the state's Arts Council.

"It was very shocking," says Ann Marie Miller, executive director of the group ArtPRIDE. "The governor has been very vocal in his support of the arts throughout the state." McGreevey, during his 2001 campaign, "had told us that he wanted to give us a blueprint for increasing funding," Miller explains.

To the contrary, if McGreevey gets his way when the budget goes into effect on July 1, the council's entire $18 million budget will be eliminated, along with those of both the state's Cultural Trust and its Historical Commission.

This puts New Jersey in the company of Missouri, where Democratic Gov. Bob Holden has likewise proposed that the state make do without funding for the Missouri Arts Council (MAC). In Arizona, the legislature is currently toying with a similar complete defunding of the arts.

In fact, arts budgets are on the ropes all over the country. Washington Gov. Gary Locke, a Democrat facing a $2 billion deficit, has proposed cutting $2.2 million from the Washington State Arts Commission, or 39 percent of its budget. Gov. Gray Davis's proposal in California would more than halve the arts budget there.

To be sure, it is an extraordinarily difficult time for state budgets. In the mid- to late '90s, the states enjoyed healthy revenue streams and almost universally cut taxes and increased spending, including on programs mandated by the federal government (like Medicaid and standardized testing). Now, as the economy enters a second year of doldrums, the states—49 of which are constitutionally required to keep a balanced budget, unlike the federal government—are paying the price for their earlier optimism.

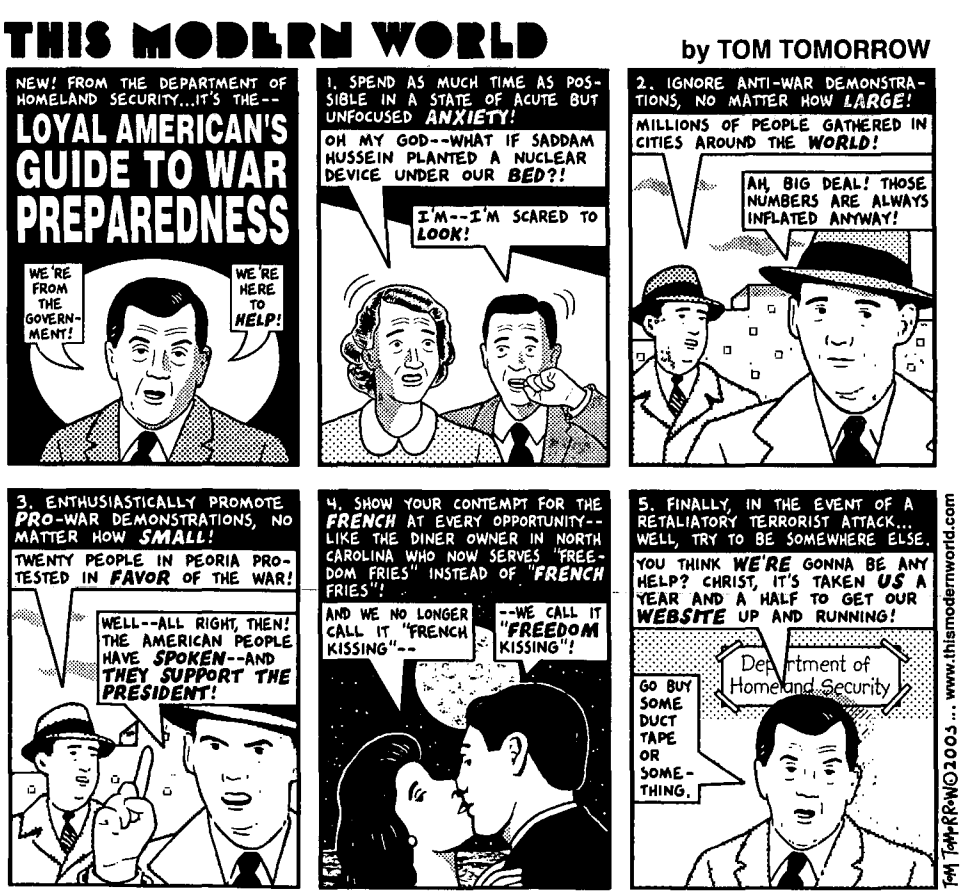
Even Kimber Craine, communications manager at the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, has some sympathy for governors and legislatures forced to make hard choices about arts funding. "It's a particularly awful time," Craine says. "These budget deficits are huge, and states just have no idea where they're going to find the money."

Crane points to California, which has a deficit currently hovering around $35 billion. "Even if they shut down the entire state government, just laid everybody off, they couldn't close that budget gap. ... The states are in their worst financial condition since World War II."

Nor does the horizon look particularly rosy, thanks to the federal budget policy being pursued by the Bush administration. With the president calling not only for elimination of the dividend tax, but an acceleration of the 2001 tax cuts, states are not likely to see more revenue any time soon. Throw in the fact that the federal government has long made a habit of mandating state programs (think last year's No Child Left Behind Act) without adequately funding them, and the states are in big trouble.

On February 24, the president told a delegation from the National Governors Association that help is definitely not on the way. "We've got an issue with our own budget, and you've got issues with your budgets," the president said.

In the meantime, all that the state arts councils are asking is that governors and legislators not make them suffer disproportionately, especially considering their budgets typically represent such a tiny portion of state expenditures in the first place. Most of all, arts advocates are hopeful that states keep in mind the tremendous economic impact the arts have on their communities. Says Arts Council Executive Director Norree Boyd: "A symphony is not just a symphony playing a symphony in a symphony hall." ■



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Faith No More

Texas' record shows dangers of faith-based policy

By Don Monkerud

The list of "faith-based" initiatives sponsored by the Bush administration continues to grow. In January, the Department of Health and Human Services released federal funds to religious groups in Ohio and Pennsylvania to promote marriage. Days afterward, the Bush administration proposed releasing federal housing money to religious groups to erect or refurbish buildings where religious services are held.

That adds to the $30 million HHS doled out to numerous groups back in October from the "Compassion Capital Fund" (see "Blessing for Whom?" November 25). Religious groups receiving funding included Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing International and the National Center for Faith Based Initiative [sic], a local ministry in West Palm Beach, Florida. The latter describes itself as working to create wealth and "empower our people to steward that wealth for the purposes of the kingdom." Last July, more than $1 billion in federal grants was made available to religious groups that sponsor after-school programs, despite charges that these groups discriminate in hiring based on religion.

All this may not bode well for the recipients of such religious services, according to a recent report from Bush's home state. The report, "The Texas Faith-Based Initiative at Five Years," examines the programs begun by Bush when he was governor. The report is sponsored by the Texas Freedom Network (TFN), an alliance of 7,500 religious and community leaders.

In 1996, Texas appointed an almost entirely Christian commission to eliminate regulations that prevented faith-based providers from receiving government funds. Then Governor Bush pushed agencies to change policies and eliminate licensing and inspection requirements for religious charities, and Texas became the first state to implement taxpayer-funded religious services.

After five years of such experimentation, Texas discovered many serious flaws:

- After Texas' Department of Protective and Regulatory Services stopped regulating childcare providers, rates of confirmed abuse and neglect at the religious facilities rose quickly and are now 25 times higher than at state-licensed facilities. Religious facilities had a 75 percent complaint rate, compared to 5.4 percent at state-licensed facilities.
- Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse inspectors presented Teen Challenge, a Christian residential drug treatment program and one of Bush's highly-touted models, with a 49-page list of violations of state regulations. Teen Challenge said its mission was "to evangelize people" and "initiate the discipleship process to the point where students can function as Christians ... applying spiritually motivated Bible principles." The program had no credentialed counselors, no chemical dependency services, failed to

IN SHORT

Just Eat It

Adolescent girls can now look to America's beef producers for tips on how to be a "real girl."

"Cool to be Real" (www.cool-2b-real.com), a Web site sponsored by the Cattlemen's Beef Board and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, promotes healthy eating, fitness, self-esteem—and don't forget beef consumption.

According to a study done by Teenage Research Unlimited, one in four teens considers vegetarianism "cool." Apparently, the beef industry now wants these kids to know that it's "cool to be real."

Splattered with pink, purple and yellow, the Web site advises girls on "keepin' it real" and how to pick your "real friends." Girls can also make their voices heard in the "real girl poll," which asks what type of beef—steak, tacos, burgers or subs—is their favorite to eat with friends.

The "smart snackin' " section provides beef-loaded recipes, where cattlemen suggest making roast beef and veggie wraps, or a meatball and veggie platter (complete with ranch dressing, for even tastier meatballs). Both of these smart snacks contain over 500 calories and 40 grams of fat per serving—more than half the FDA-recommended daily fat intake for teen-age girls. ("It's a real drag to have your energy zapped by some silly diet," the site claims—without mentioning fish or poultry as a way to get that much-needed protein.)

Michele Peterson, spokeswoman for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, says that because the site is sponsored by NCBA, it is simply "providing information about why beef is nutritious." She stresses all foods should be consumed in moderation.

This includes ranch dressing.—JW

Points for Pink

BY JESSICA WHITE AND STACIA FALAT

Code Pink Women's Pre-emptive Strike for Peace members are making an anti-war statement—with color. Group members, self-proclaimed "women for peace," can be found at protests nationwide donning bright pink scarves, hats, coats and saucer-sized buttons.

With loosely defined borders, anyone can join the movement, simply by wearing pink. Groups have sprung up in California, Colorado, Missouri, Minnesota, Texas, Utah, Vermont and even internationally. "We love our country, but we will never wrap ourselves in red, white and blue," reads Code Pink's Web site (www.codepink4peace.org). "We choose pink ... the color of the dawn of a new era when cooperation and negotiation prevail over force."

The reason behind the group's popularity? "We're dressed in pink, so it's hard to ignore us," says Medea Benjamin, founding director of Global Exchange, who organized the group with veteran activist Starhawk.

In addition to carrying on group hunger strikes, Code Pink has conducted an ongoing peace vigil in front of White House gates since November 17. The vigil ends March 8, on International Women's Day, and will culminate in a march encircling the White House and a rally co-sponsored by NOW, United for Peace & Justice and other groups. Notable speakers include Alice Walker, Janeane Garafolo, Barbara Ehrenreich and Nobel Peace Prize winner and anti-land mine campaigner Jody Williams.—SF

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inform clients of their rights, and was found to be illegally handling medications.

• Jobs Partnership's stated mission was to help clients "find employment through a relationship with Jesus Christ." The group's budget and curriculum show that $8,000 of state money was used to buy Bibles and that the program focused primarily on Bible study.

A district court found use of the state funds unconstitutional because they were used for religious purposes, and also said the state had violated clients' religious freedom by not providing a secular alternative. The only other job training program in the area was located in the next county.

• The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, run by religious and crime-fighting Texas conservatives, was given $1.5 million in state funds for a religious-sponsored job training program that required "total surrender to Christ." IRFFR beat out a Lockheed Martin and University of Texas-sponsored program in competition for the funding, despite the fact that the university program had a job placement rate almost 300 times greater than IRFFR's.

• Bypassing public debate, the Department of Criminal Justice used $1.5 million to fund the Inner Change prison prerelease program, a "Christ-centered, bible-based" program sponsored by Prison Fellowship Ministries, founded by Watergate conspirator Chuck Colson. The program, which proposes to encourage "the spiritual and moral regeneration" of offenders and create respect for "God's law," received funding despite a lack of evidence that the program reduces recidivism.

Texas' faith-based program created so many problems that, in 2001, the Texas legislature chose not to renew the state's accreditation program for church-run childcare providers.

Now, the religious-sponsored rollback of state licensing and oversight appears to be lessening. Through October, only eight religious-supported childcare programs and 129 Christian chemical-dependency recovery programs had requested exemption from state licensing. More than 2,000 childcare centers and 900 chemical dependency programs maintain state licensing.

Despite failures in Texas, Bush continues to push his federal faith-based initiative, largely through the use of presidential orders that circumvent congressional debate. "As the nation considers this public policy possibility," says Ashley McIlvain, political director for TFN, "Texas already has a record with these policies. We know that faith-based initiatives violate the religious freedom of people in need. In Texas, our record shows that the faith-based initiative also puts people in danger." ■

APPALL-O-METER

BY DAVE MULCAHEY

File Sharing Is On 6.8

Big Brother is watching you ... shopping. According to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz,* honchos at eBay are positively begging law enforcement agencies to help themselves to the company's vast stores of information. Addressing the Cyber Crime 2003 conference in February, eBay executive Joseph Sullivan assured the assembled cops, dicks and spooks, "There's no need for a court order."

Really, he means it. "When someone uses our site and clicks on the 'I Agree' button, it is as if he agrees to let us submit all of his data to the legal authorities," Sullivan continued. "Which means that if you are a law-enforcement officer, all you have to do is send us a fax with a request for information, and ask about the person behind the seller's identity number, and we will provide you with his name, address, sales history and other details—all without having to produce a court order. We want law enforcement people to spend time on our site."

Oh, and last summer eBay bought PayPal. "Which means that we have 20 million files on its users," Sullivan beamed. "If you contact me, I will hook you up with the Paypal people. They will help you get the information you're looking for."

Glories of Socialism 2.7

Britain's health and education departments are backing a classroom campaign that urges teens to experiment with oral sex as an alternative to going "all the way." That's right. According to the *Times* of London, more than 100,000 pupils under the age of 16 have taken the course, called "A Pause," which aims to apprise youngsters of ways to shunt the love train onto safer tracks. British teens are Western Europe's most prolific under-age procreators, and the program means to make a dent in the teen pregnancy rate.

Predictably, decency-leaguers are waving their twisted knickers. The House of Lords is currently considering the Sexual Offenses Bill—don't laugh—which would make it illegal for anyone to "arrange or facilitate the commission of a child sex offense." While the people who run A Pause do not believe that's what they're doing, the law could spell the end of their program. And then who will tell the children?

Our Bodies, Our Toys 9.5

A Nicaraguan couple is trying to convince their government to allow their 9-year-old daughter, who became pregnant after being raped, to have an abortion. "We want this intervention as soon as possible, for her health and well-being," the victim's father told Nicaraguan reporters, quoted in the *Guardian.*

Where Nicaraguan law stands on the matter is murky. A victim of sexual abuse can abort her fetus, but the abuse must be confirmed by three specialists. Some leading citizens, including Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo of Managua, have argued that mother and fetus are doing just fine and no abortion is necessary.

But the victim has her own reasons for wanting one. "I don't want to share my toys with other children," she said. "I take care of my toys."



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School Ties

Israeli divestment campaign carries on

By Ian Urbina

Last fall, the topic of campus divestment from Israel stirred so much heated controversy that it seemed like it might actually boil over. National op-ed pages teemed with arguments on the issue, and rarely a month went by without a mass arrest as students protested at group sit-ins on campus.

While media attention has abated recently, the campaign continues. "We are still going strong," says Fadi Kiblawi, one the main organizers at the University of Michigan divestment chapter. "Even though there are lots of issues to watch right now, divestment is increasing its momentum."

Students at about 50 campuses across the country continue to petition their schools to divest themselves of stock in companies that have ties to Israel. The movement—meant as a nonviolent, grassroots and international method for pressuring an end to Israeli occupation—is modeled on successful efforts in the '70s and '80s to rid university portfolios of investments in companies doing business in South Africa.

But the topic is still not without its occasional flare-ups. In February, Duke University President Nan Keohane rejected a campus call to divest from companies with military ties to Israel. Students responded with a barrage of critical letters to the administration.

The divestment movement got its start in fall of 2000. On the campus of the University of California-Berkeley, one of the campaign's first hot spots, a group called Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) initiated a campaign imploring the Board of Regents to reconsider the estimated $6.4 billion that the UC system currently invests in companies that do substantial business with Israel (defined by the group as transactions worth $5 million or more annually).

Their petition states that there should be no investment in Israel until four conditions are met: full compliance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for an Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories; an end to Israel's legal use of torture; a full freeze on settlements; and the application of U.N. Security Council Resolution 194, which stipulates the right of refugees to return home. To date, the group has collected more than 6,000 signatures from students.

In the Ivy League, Harvard University has been highly active in the effort. In a joint campaign with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard has drawn backing from nearly 200 students and more than 100 faculty. Their petition also features the signatures of professors at several Israeli universities.



MARK WILSON / GETTY

Harvard University President Lawrence Summers: The divestment movement is "anti-Semitic."

Harvard also became one of the spots of the most pointed debate after Lawrence Summers, college president and Clinton-era treasury secretary, publicly lambasted the divestment movement as "anti-Semitic" in effect, if not in intent. But many of the campaign's most prominent supporters, at Harvard and MIT in particular, are themselves Jewish. Sylvain Bromberger, an MIT philosopher whose family escaped capture by the Nazis, published one of the stronger defenses of those working in the divestment movement.

"They are good and courageous people, the sort of people who took great risks to save Jews during the occupation," Bromberger wrote to Summers. "What you insinuated about them was sheer, crude calumny. You must have known that. You must know people like them. As a Jew, I found your statement to be slanderous. As a holder of a Harvard degree, I found it embarrassing."

Harvard psychology professor Elizabeth Spelke, whose family has roots in Israel, is also a strong backer of the divestment effort. "I simply couldn't afford to sit back any longer."

Divestment of any sort at Harvard has always been a hard sell. As late as 1989, Harvard still held significant stock in the South African economy and put up dogged resistance that same year when Archbishop Desmond Tutu (a strong supporter of the current Israeli divestment campaign) attempted to get a seat on the Harvard Board of Overseers in order to pressure the university. Currently, Harvard has roughly $614 million invested in companies that do major business with Israel.

Aside from inflammatory accusations of anti-Semitism, current proponents of divestment face far steeper challenges than their anti-apartheid predecessors. "I was involved with the campaign to divest from South Africa; I was at Berkeley at the time," Todd Gitlin, a '60s radical and one-time president of Students for a Democratic Society, said in December. "The arguments against that were all tactical—no one stood up to defend the principles of apartheid. That's one huge difference."

The South African divestment campaign was sown on fertile soil in the United States, where the memory of the civil rights movement fed directly into outrage over apartheid's explicitly racial caste system. The Palestinian struggle against the occupation faces a far less hospitable environment: For every divestment petition, counter-petitions have collected signatures at almost double the speed.

Despite the opposition, divestment supporters aren't going away. In February, students at Rutgers and the University of Florida both started divestment campaigns, while the University of California and University of Michigan held rallies around the issue. "It's a testament to the importance of the issue," says Vincent Lloyd, leader of Princeton's campaign. "During this time of dire and legitimate concern about Iraq, it is just amazing that the active campus effort for compelling an end to the occupation continues to grow." ■

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BY BEN WINTERS

You Make the Call

Just when it seemed the democratic promise of the Internet would never come to pass, a glimmer of hope has arrived.

On February 26, the lefty online organizers known as MoveOn orchestrated their latest coup, signing up people all over the country to place a phone call to their senator's offices as part of a massive "virtual march" on Washington. Every Senator and the White House switchboard got a phone call, every minute of the work day, from Americans opposed to war in Iraq. Final numbers are impossible to verify, but according to news reports as *In These Times* went to press, at least 140,000 calls were placed by day's end.

Actions like these have made MoveOn one of the prime movers in the current movement against the war. And with at least 700,000 members signed up to date, MoveOn may be much more than a glimmer.

So how does an organization founded in late 1998, with an employee roster of only five—plus two full-time volunteers—enlist 140,000 average Americans to each make a phone call?

Simple, says MoveOn Executive Director Peter Schurman—you just ask them. "There's no trick," says Schurman on how his group drums up participation. "The trick is giving people an opportunity to have their voices heard, especially when there is a major disconnect ... between the clear consensus of public opinion and the direction that policymakers are headed."

One recent instance of such a disconnect was the extended impeachment proceedings against former President Clinton. MoveOn was one product of that tragi-comedy, a classic example of private frustration turned into public action. "Congress was wasting all its time on impeachment," Schurman recalls. "The American people weren't too happy about it."

Among the unhappy were Joan Blades and Wes Boyd, two liberal Silicon Valley entrepreneurs who had recently sold their software company, Berkeley Systems. Blades and Boyd, Schurman says, "sent an e-mail to 100 of their friends saying Congress should censure the President and move on."

In an age where many an inbox groans under the weight of infinite petitions—and many of us have given up on changing the world with a click—Boyd and Blades did it right. They created a new kind of petition, a simple online submission form, eliminating the uncertainty and logistical nightmare of the "please forward endlessly" version. And it worked. Their original e-mail to a hundred friends quickly generated half a million sign-ups, and MoveOn was born.

After the impeachment, the new organization turned its attention to Congress. While continuing to build MoveOn as an online organizer, they formed a separate entity, the MoveOn Political Action Committee, to raise money for candidates.

In fall of 2002, the PAC was an important contributor to Sen. Paul Wellstone's campaign for re-election in Minnesota before his death less than two weeks before the election. This success, Schurman says, shows that certain progressive views—especially on foreign policy—may be far more popular with the American public than common wisdom reflects. "Senator Wellstone was extremely courageous in speaking out on the war in Iraq," Schurman explains, "and benefited handsomely from it in terms of financial awards from our members."

MoveOn's model—soliciting small donations averaging just $35—allows a wide range of people to participate. The other advantage is immediacy: In just 48 hours of fundraising for former Vice President Walter Mondale, who replaced Wellstone on the ticket after his death, the MoveOn PAC says it raised $600,000.

Schurman suggests that the MoveOn PAC, along with other stalwarts of online fundraising like Emily's List, are "really the model for campaign funding in the post campaign finance reform world."

MoveOn has taken a very similar approach to raising money for its anti-war campaign. Of late, MoveOn has focused on its "Let the Inspections Work" anti-war campaign, of which the virtual march is just a part. An appeal to members to support a full-page ad in the *New York Times* in January was so successful—raising over $400,000, again in increments averaging just $35—that MoveOn was able to create an entire advertising campaign, including a television ad that ran in 13 cities.

The group's broader mission is simply civic engagement, explains Schurman. "We are putting democracy in action. We are making it possible for everyday people ... to participate meaningfully in the civic process in a way that's comfortable for them and effective."

He proudly points out that the people giving to these campaigns, and the people taking part in events like the virtual march, aren't necessarily those often associated with protest and dissent. "Our typical member is not your typical protester," Schurman says. "It's your typical mainstream American. Fathers and mothers, plumbers, teachers, grocers, whatever. This is America. These are Americans. These are voters." ■



A TV commercial from MoveOn's recent ad campaign. With 700,000 members, the group is a leading force against the war.

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Technical Foul Against Title IX

By Susan J. Douglas

Every weekend, like millions around the country, I witness a revolution. I go to a sports facility, outdoors or in, and watch girls and young women flex their muscles, sweat and compete to win. On the sidelines, family and friends passionately cheer on the girls.

When I was in high school and college, this was unheard of: Girls sat on the sidelines while the boys got to play. And then in 1972, as a result of the women's movement, came Title IX, the law that banned sex discrimination in schools in both athletics and academics. This legislation was signed into law by none other than Richard Nixon.

Here are just a few measures of the law's impact: In 1971, fewer than 300,000 high school girls played interscholastic sports. Today, the number is somewhere between 2.4 and 2.8 million. Between 1972 and 1995, the number of girls playing high school basketball increased more than 300 percent. Those of us who had barely heard of a sport called soccer in the early '70s now see our daughters' bedrooms (and the rest of the house) festooned with shin guards, cleats and posters of Mia Hamm. Since Title IX, the number of women participating in intercollegiate sports has risen fivefold.

But Title IX is not only about sports. Because the law forbade high schools from expelling girls who became pregnant, the drop-out rate for these girls began to decline significantly starting in the '80s. The number of women and girls taking math and science courses, attending college and getting advanced degrees has also soared since the passage of Title IX. Nonetheless, girls still have 30 percent fewer opportunities to play high school and college sports than boys.

So, wouldn't this be an excellent time to claim that Title IX constitutes "reverse discrimination" and to try to eliminate it, or at least weaken it considerably? Team Bush, never missing a chance to try to dismantle any program that advances equal opportunity (they are slavering to get rid of Head Start), has set its sights on Title IX. Deploying egalitarian, compassionate slogans like "Leave No Child Behind" (which should be renamed "Piss on the Little Bastards"), Team Bush trusts that their little mottos will hide the fact they are trying to wreck what they claim to be saving.

Thus, Team Bush put together a panel to review Title IX with a name right out of 1984, the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics. The 15-member commission was headed by Stanford University Athletic Director Ted Leland and former WNBA star Cynthia Cooper and charged



with submitting its report to Education Secretary Rod Paige.

The review was reportedly motivated by a suit filed against the Department of Education by the National Wrestling Coaches of America, which claims Title IX had led to the decimation of men's wrestling at the college level. The wrestlers have not targeted NCAA football, a sport that can devour massive amounts of money for recruitment, stadiums, publicity and coaches. But why take on the guys in helmets when you can go after the girls?

Just for the record, between 1982 and 1999, the General Accounting Office reported that 311 men's wrestling, tennis and gymnastics teams were indeed eliminated; 302 men's soccer, baseball and basketball teams were added; and football, our most noble sport, had the largest increase in participants.

By late January and early February, portions of the commission's report began to circulate in the press. Two of the commission members, Julie Foudy, captain of the U.S. Women's Soccer Team, and Donna de Varona, a former Olympic swimmer, issued a minority report to the press. They charged that the hearings were set up so that opponents testifying against Title IX outnumbered proponents by 2-to-1.

They then took aim at several proposed changes in the law. One would allow schools to count "ghost slots" in athletic programs, a number of positions on a team roster that schools never actually fill, but which could be cited to artificially inflate the percentage of athletic opportunities they give women.

Another change would allow schools not to count "walk-ons," men they have not recruited through scholarships but who participate in sports anyway. Thus, they could undercount the number of men who actually play. These and other proposals, relying on such fuzzy math would make it look like more women and fewer men were participating in school sports.

Various women's groups, including the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, the American Association of University Professors, the National Women's Law Center and the Women's Sports Foundation, used Foudy and de Varona's public dissent to launch a counterattack. Actresses Geena Davis and Holly Hunter became spokeswomen for a "Save Title IX" campaign. On February 26, when the commission's report was released, Maine's Olympia Snowe, along with five other senators, sent a letter to Bush denouncing efforts to undermine Title IX.

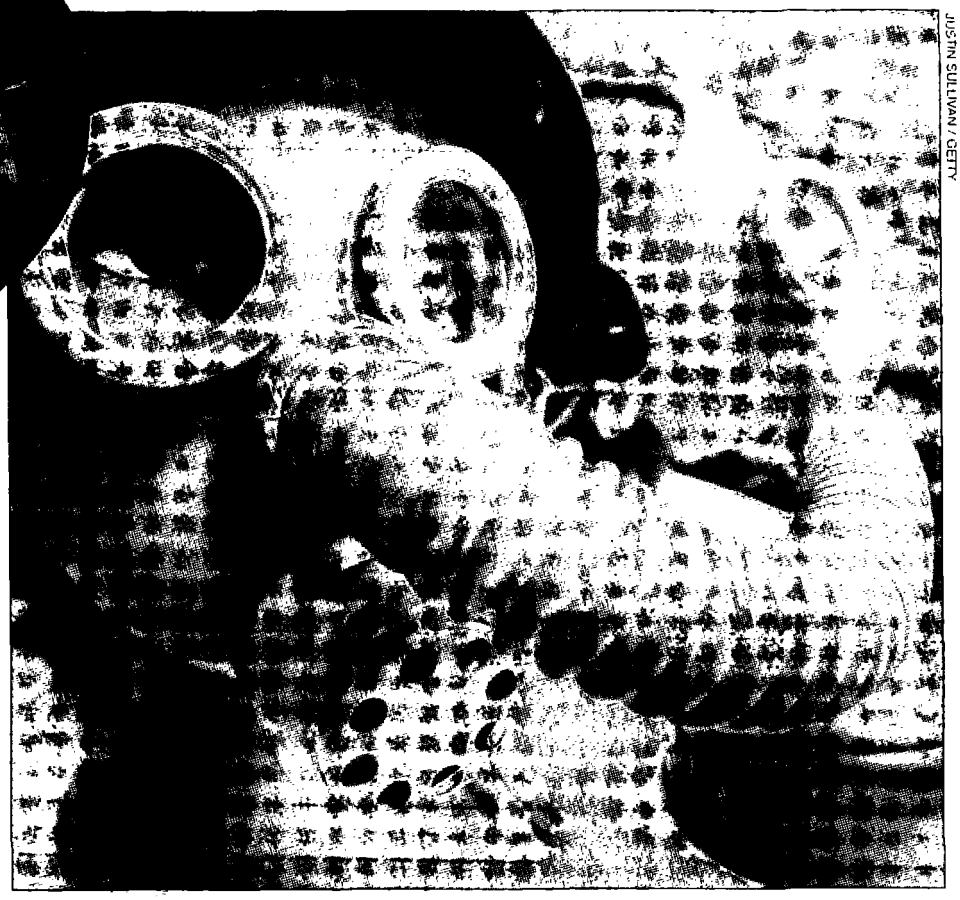
The next day (as of press time), the controversy over undermining Title IX had gotten so heated Paige announced the only recommendations he would consider were those that received unanimous support from the commission. For the time being, the proposals most potentially damaging to women have been tabled thanks to all those women and their righteous male allies.

Bush never misses a chance to dismantle any program that advances equal opportunity.

Team Bush is totally out of step with the rest of the country on this issue. But that never stops these guys. What they can't get through public venues they will try to enact behind closed doors. So keep your eyes peeled, your hockey sticks poised, your boxing gloves at hand and your cleats ready to do some serious marching. ■

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FIRST STONE



JUSTIN SULLIVAN / GETTY

By Joel Bleifuss

Nukes for Every Occasion

The Bush administration is planning to take nuclear weapon development to a whole new level, according to the minutes of a January 10 Pentagon meeting that were leaked to the Los Alamos Study Group, www.lasg.org.

The meeting, chaired by Dale Klein, assistant secretary for nuclear, chemical and biological defense, was attended by military personnel, managers of U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories and officials from the National Nuclear Stewardship Administration (NNSA). The top item on the agenda was to plan a secret conference for the week of August 4, 2003, at U.S. Strategic Command headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska, where the subject under discussion will be the development of "small strike" nuclear weapons.

The conference, to be held in the command's underground bunker, will feature various panels.

The "Future Arsenal Panel" will address future weapons needs based on Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), a Pentagon policy paper released last year that identified Russia, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya as potential nuclear targets. One of the main questions that panel will grapple with: "What are the warhead characteristics and advanced concepts we will need in the post-NPR environment?" To that end, the panel will explore the military opportunities offered by "low-yield weapons, EPWs [earth-penetrating weapons], enhanced radiation weapons, agent defeat weapons."

The "Strategy and Policy Panel" will brainstorm ways to get this new generation of nuclear weapons into production. It will address complex issues like how the United States should "adjust its policy on nuclear weapons testing" and how to sell Congress and the public on "the deterrent value of reduced-collateral damage, precision, agent defeat, and penetrating nuclear capabilities in meeting our national security objectives."

Don't Be Afraid

"Terrorism forces us to make a choice. Don't be afraid. ... Be ready," those are the first words you read when you log on to www.ready.gov, the Department of Homeland Security Web site. As the site explains, "Terrorists are working to obtain biological, chemical, nuclear and radiological weapons, and the threat of an attack is very real."

So what should you do? Besides the already infamous plastic sheeting and duct tape, other preparations can be made. For example, the site features a section titled "Plan for your pets." It also provides a helpful list of items that "may make a time of crisis more comfortable," such as a "plastic bucket with a tight lid." And should the threat go nuclear, the "Nuclear Blast" page advises readers: "Consider keeping potassium iodide in your emergency kit, learn what the appropriate doses are for each of your family members." And don't forget the dog.

Israel Firsters?

New Republic senior editor Lawrence Kaplan recently took to the op-ed page of the *Washington Post* to inveigh against those on the left, right and center who dare to question the allegiance of the neoconservative ideologues—Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser, among others—who are currently driving U.S. policy for a war with Iraq. To make his argument, Kaplan plays the anti-Semitism card. "The charge that the administration's 'rabid Israel supporters' are behind the drive to war is risible," Kaplan writes. "Invoking the specter of dual loyalty ... is the nullification of public discourse, for how can

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one refute accusations grounded in ethnicity. The charges are, ipso facto, impossible to disprove."

But they are possible to prove. Robert L. Norberg, a former Aramco executive, in a letter to the *Post*, writes:

> In 1996, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser, all of whom now hold influential policy positions in the Bush administration, co-authored a paper titled "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," which was hand-delivered by Mr. Perle to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. The "realm" referred to Israel, and "removing Saddam Hussein from power" was described as a means of containing Syria and as "an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right."
>
> The paper, which was described as "a framework for a series of follow-up reports on strategy," also counseled the Likud prime minister on how to massage American public opinion and U.S. policy-makers. The point is not that Messrs. Perle, Feith and Wurmser are "doing Israel's bidding," but that they wrote a plan for Israeli foreign policy that they are now positioned to carry out within the U.S. government. The least they can do is recuse themselves.

Ready, Aim, Destroy

Want Richard Perle, or one of his crowd, to weigh in on your nightly news show? Contact Eleana Benador, who runs the neocon speakers bureau Benador Associates. In addition to Perle, she schedules the media appearances of Charles Krauthammer, Richard Pipes, Alexander Haig and Michael Ledeen. According to www.benadorassociates.com, her clients are more than talking heads, they are writers, having contributed 37 articles to the *Washington Post*, 17 to the *Wall Street Journal*, 15 to the *Los Angeles Times* and six to the *New York Times*.

What are they saying? Ledeen, in *National Review Online*, writes:

> We should have no misgiving about our ability to destroy tyrannies. It is what we do best. It comes naturally to us, for we are the one truly revolutionary country in the world, as we have been for more than 200 years. Creative destruction is our middle name. We do it automatically, and that is precisely why the tyrants hate us and are driven to attack us.

From the Focus Group

The following are among the better protest signs seen at a recent Washington demonstration:

A picture of Bush saying, "Why should I care what the American people think? They didn't vote for me."

"1,000 points of light and one dim bulb."

"HEADLINE: Drunken frat boy drives country into ditch."

"Bush is proof that empty warheads can be dangerous."

"Frodo has failed. Bush has the ring."

Al-Qaeda Dependent?

In an interview on *Now with Bill Moyers*, investigative reporter Seymour Hersh elaborated on a *New Yorker* article he wrote last year. He tells reporter Jane Wallace that Delta Force clandestine operatives told him U.S. forces had cornered "the cream of the crop of al-Qaeda" in the village of Kunduz, which is 150 miles from Pakistan. However, U.S. commanders gave the order for the troops to hold their fire and allow planes to take off from Kunduz and evacuate "no less than 2,500, maybe 3,000" al-Qaeda operatives along with dozens of senior Pakistani military officers and "maybe even some of Bin Laden's immediate family."

The United States, reasons Hersh, held its fire at the request of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf. He needed the support of Inter Services Intelligence, Pakistan's secret service, whose members had been in Afghanistan training the Taliban and al-Qaeda and were caught in the conflict. "The initial plan was to take out the Pakistani military," Hersh says. "What happened is that they took out al-Qaeda with them. And we had no way of stopping it. We lost control. ... Thousands of al-Qaeda got out."

On the bright side, al-Qaeda will still exist after Saddam is gone.

It's a Grand Old Party

The Republican Party has outsourced its fundraising to HCL Technologies. The company has put in place a team of 75 operators who will call asking people to support President Bush and give money to the Republican Party. The telemarketers will work out of the company call centers in Noida and Gurgaon, India.

Those Jackasses

Democrats in the New Mexico House have introduced legislation requiring that a third party receive 10 percent of the statewide vote (up from 5 percent) in order to earn major party status. Such a move would effectively take the Green Party of New Mexico off the ballot.

Oh My God!

Dr. W. David Hager is author of *As Jesus Cared for Women: Restoring Women Then and Now*. As a practicing OB/GYN, he refuses to prescribe contraceptives to unmarried women, and he advises women suffering from premenstrual syndrome to read the Bible and pray. He is also an ardent opponent of the "morning after" pill RU-486. Another crackpot? No, Hager is President Bush's choice to head up the FDA's Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee, which regulates drugs and devices used in obstetrics, gynecology and contraception.

Lincoln's Legacy

The Christian right is up in arms over a video currently playing at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. In the video, an actor reads the words of Lincoln accompanied by footage of demonstrators carrying signs that read "The Lord Is My Shepherd and Knows I Am Gay," "Keep Abortion Legal," and "Ratify the ERA."

"It stinks!" says Rev. Louis Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition. "I am outraged that tax dollars are paying to promote such a lie that Lincoln would have supported homosexual causes, abortion rights and feminism."

Sheldon is asking his followers to write the National Park Service and demand that Lincoln not be "misused and abused" in order "to seduce Americans into believing fighting for homosexual sodomy and the murder of unborn children is the same as marching through Selma."

We will never know what Lincoln would have thought of all the fuss. However, after moving to Springfield in 1837, he did share a double bed for more than three years with Joshua Speed, who would later recall that "no two men were ever more intimate." ■

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Give KUCINICH a Chance

By David Moberg

Des Moines, Iowa

On February 17, 2002, speaking before members of the Southern California chapter of Americans for Democratic Action, Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich delivered an impassioned, poetic denunciation of the Bush administration's policies and a hopeful, progressive vision of American patriotism. Without his knowledge, the president of ADA afterward e-mailed friends a copy of the speech, titled "A Prayer for America," with Kucinich's e-mail address attached. The speech fanned out across the Web, and soon more than 25,000 enthusiastic fan letters flooded in, with requests to speak across the country.

Precisely one year later, Kucinich was at the Adventureland Hotel just east of snowbound Des Moines, announcing to a group of Iowa labor leaders that he was exploring a presidential run. The field of candidates was already crowded and is likely to grow even larger, including contenders who are better known and better funded than Kucinich. But Kucinich's long-shot candidacy was greeted enthusiastically by Iowa progressives, who hope his forceful critique of Bush's Iraq policy will shape the presidential debate over the coming year. Kucinich's outspoken leadership on Iraq, labor, health care, globalization and other issues has the potential to mobilize a movement to give him a very strong standing in next January's party caucus meetings, where progressives usually have a strong presence.

In the late '70s, Kucinich, the son of a poor, inner-city, blue-collar family, burst on the national political scene as the progressive "boy mayor" of Cleveland, duking it out with the city's establishment to save the municipal power company. He won that fight but lost the mayor's office, spending years as a college lecturer and TV reporter before returning to politics. Elected to the state Senate in 1994, he defeated a Republican incumbent in 1996 to win his congressional seat.

As co-chairman of the Progressive Caucus, Kucinich, 56, has been a leader in fights against unfair trade agreements, the USA Patriot Act, the war in Iraq and privatization of Social Security. He also has been a vigorous advocate of unions and workers rights as well as national health insurance. He has departed from a consistently progressive record mainly on abortion, where he has almost uniformly voted against pro-choice positions. He now says that he supports *Roe v. Wade* and a woman's right to choose, but expresses hope that education about sex and personal responsibilities as well as better social and economic policies can make abortion less necessary.

But beyond his leadership, voting record and forthright positions on a wide range of issues, including such political hot buttons as opposition to capital punishment, Kucinich is unusual in the way he links together foreign and domestic policy to a vision of America—and of a revived Democratic Party in the mold of FDR—which he expresses in a prophetic, Whitman-esque style.

Kucinich opposes war in Iraq on a variety of counts. He joined a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a war without congressional authorization. He argues that "the administration has not made a case to attack Iraq, but they set about a course of action that borders on fabricating a case to attack Iraq. The attack on Iraq derives from ideology more than facts."

Citing Bob Woodward's book *Bush at War*, Kucinich argues that immediately after September 11, 2001, the administration sought to use the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as an excuse for war against Iraq. The White House has opposed any inquiry into 9/11, Kucinich says, because it would demonstrate there's no link with Iraq. "I believe the country has a right to defend itself," says Kucinich, who voted to authorize Bush to respond to 9/11. "But the administration seized 9/11 as a way to run an agenda for empire."

"This administration is saying we're going to establish an American imperium, and nobody is going to stop any of our efforts to advance economic interests or military interests," he adds, singling out the administration's National Security Strategy, Nuclear Posture Review and the statements of people like Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz as evidence of this imperial strategy. "This Bush administration is trying to achieve the militarization of thought in our culture. They've achieved a level of fear with Orwellian overtones."

Rather than wage war against Afghanistan in pursuit of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Kucinich argues that the most effective response would have been "international cooperation in police work, detective work, tracking people down. If police work becomes impossible because governments provide support for the criminals, then it's important for the international community to be involved in other steps to bring criminals to justice. ... That's why I have supported the International Criminal Court."

Kucinich worries that war in Iraq will unleash new terrorist attacks and further isolate the United States. If elected, he would fight terrorism with "bread, not bombs" and by strengthening "a foreign policy which rejects unilateralism, interventionism, preemption and a first-strike option with nuclear weapons."

Instead of pursuing international treaties to control arms and protect the environment, he says, "what's happening now is we're sealing ourselves off from the rest of the world with duct tape and plastic, with orange lights flashing garishly in the night."

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Although he supported a resolution calling for regime change in Iraq, Kucinich rejects a war now even under U.N. authorization, since "the United States is clearly trying to drag the United Nations into this war. If the United States worked cooperatively with the United Nations for a peaceful solution, guess what? That's what we'd have."

Saddam can be contained not only with inspection, he says, but the overwhelming deterrent threat of American military force. Despite Saddam's record, which includes years of U.S. support, Kucinich adds, "There are a lot of regimes that need to be changed in the world. It's not the job of America to change any regime, save perhaps our own."



The Ohio underdog explores a run for the White House.

Kucinich's political prospects clearly hinge on the popular response to war with Iraq, but he is not campaigning solely as a peace candidate. "I'm the peace candidate," he says. "I'm the environmental candidate. I'm the repeal-NAFTA candidate. I'm the candidate for international cooperation. I'm the candidate for civil liberties. I'm the candidate for education. I'm the candidate for universal health care. I'm the candidate to preserve Social Security from privatization."

He told Iowa labor leaders that, if elected, he would put his union card on his desk and declare 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue as "Workers Local No. 1." In a speech that was elegantly written by Kucinich himself, if not especially well-delivered, he promised a "Workers White House" that would withdraw from NAFTA, emphasize workers rights and environmental protection in future bilateral trade agreements, promote collective bargaining, and eliminate social weapons of mass destruction. "Joblessness is a weapon of mass destruction," he says. "Crushing poverty is a weapon of mass destruction. Homelessness is a weapon of mass destruction."

The Bush administration has no money for health care, childcare, living wages, Social Security or Medicare, he says, "only money for tax cuts for the rich and only money for war. That's your money they're spending to send your sons and daughters to war."

"I see this election as a being a struggle for the soul of the Democratic Party," Kucinich says. "What I think I can do is not only change the debate in this election, but bring to the White House a presidency that will change the direction of America away from unilateralism and pre-emption to a holistic worldview of interdependence, where diplomacy is used to create a world where we can make war archaic."

As Iowa union leaders gathered in the Adventureland bar after Kucinich and the rest of the panel of presidential candidates spoke, reactions were divided. A few pro-war workers, including a group of firefighters and a Rock Island arsenal employee, liked what he said, except for the war, though one thought he was "kind of a wild man."

But overall Kucinich and former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean were viewed more favorably than Sens. Joseph Lieberman and John Edwards. "I like Kucinich talking about having a worker in the White House," says Barb Harrington, a Communications Workers local officer.

"I don't know if he can do it, but it's time to support someone you believe in," says state Postal Workers President Bruce Clark. "I think he's the best thing since [the late Sen. Paul] Wellstone came along."

Fred Noon, president of a Laborers local and a Vietnam vet, is enthusiastic about Kucinich's views on Iraq and his support for single-payer national health insurance. "It's not an answer," he says. "It's the only answer."

It's a long slog until the caucuses. Kucinich doesn't even have an Iowa organization, and more prominent candidates have already snapped up veteran organizers. But Iowa progressives seem cheered by his candidacy. "I think his prospects are good because of the war," says David Osterberg, director of the Iowa Policy Project. "Kucinich identifies this as part of something bigger—globalization—that benefits a few corporations and high-paid CEOs and doesn't help Americans in general."

"I think he and others that we're hearing will help move the entire Democratic delegation to a more progressive point of view on war and peace issues," says Chuck Day, chairman of Star-PAC, a politically active peace group. "Howard Dean declared his candidacy before Kucinich, but you'd have to put him right at the top of the list on this issue."

Kucinich will have serious competition, even for the issue-oriented progressive vote, to rise out of what's now seen as the second tier of candidates, let alone become a real contender for the nomination. But as the prospect of war looms, his prayer for a more humane, less imperial America is striking a chord in many Democratic hearts. ■

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FEAR of a BLACK CANDIDATE

Aaron McGruder, the radical cartoonist, insists that the Rev. Al Sharpton's "perm" prevents him from being taken seriously as a presidential candidate. But the Democratic National Committee (DNC) seems worried enough that they drafted a black woman, former Illinois Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, to dilute Sharpton's potential electoral power.

Or at least that's the reigning theory among many political observers. Sharpton, 48, a controversial New York-based activist, makes many mainstream Democrats uncomfortable. His advocacy for victims of police abuse or racial violence is his primary claim to fame, or, as with his involvement in the bogus Tawana Brawley rape case, infamy.

Sharpton has made occasional but serious forays into electoral politics. He ran twice for the Senate (1992 and 1994) and once for mayor of New York City (1997), polling respectable but racially polarized numbers each time. He has become a formidable political figure in New York, and his blessing is sought by nearly every Democratic candidate running for a city or statewide seat. Presidential candidates also have been known to show up at Sharpton's Harlem headquarters.

Still, many New York Democrats blame Sharpton's "divisive" tactics for the 2001 election of Republican Mayor Michael Bloomberg in a city with five times as many registered Democrats as Republicans. "His strength comes mainly not in guaranteeing that people can win, but in guaranteeing they won't win if he doesn't support them," Fred Siegel, a fellow at the Democratic Leadership Council's Public Policy Institute, recently told *The American Prospect*.

The centrist DLC is one of Sharpton's major targets. He blames the group for pulling the Democratic Party to the right and sees his campaign as part of an effort to halt that rightward drift. But Sharpton has received little support from any party officials. In a November poll, two-thirds of DNC members said they had a negative view of Sharpton.

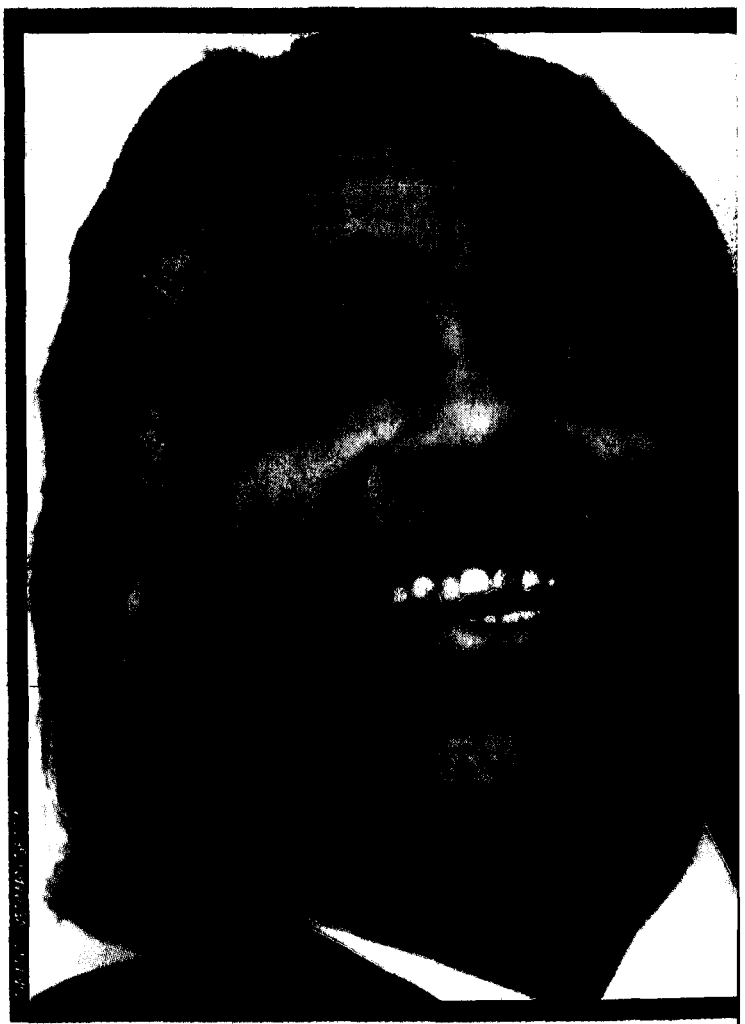
Enter Moseley-Braun. "Party insiders see Moseley-Braun as their Great Black Hope to stop the rise of the Rev. Al Sharpton as a major player in the Democratic presidential sweepstakes," wrote *Chicago Tribune* columnist Clarence Page.

An unnamed Democratic strategist told the *Washington Post* that "the DNC made a concerted effort to get Sharpton out, and he wouldn't play along. This is how they do it."

Illinois Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. told the Internet newsletter *Politics NH.com*: "I have heard rumors—not unlike what the DLC did when they tried to use former Virginia Gov. Doug Wilder to undercut my father's potential campaign in 1992—that she is possibly being led into this race by Democratic forces who would not like to see Al Sharpton in the race or do very well, and they see her as being able to undercut his campaign."

The general outline of this conspiracy has Donna Brazile, manager of Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign, pulling the strings. Brazile, now chairwoman of the DNC's Voting Rights Institute, acknowledges urging Moseley-Braun to join the presidential fray, but denies it was done to contain Sharpton. "Carol will bring a message to a group of voters who are often ignored, and that's the black female vote," Brazile told the *Washington Times*. "It's unfortunate that the party hasn't had a black woman run since Shirley Chisholm in 1972."

If she does run, Moseley-Braun will be one of at least eight candidates in a wide-open race for the Democratic nomination. But she will be the lone woman. "It's time to take the 'Men Only' sign off the White House door," Moseley-Braun declared in her February 18 speech at the University of Chicago announcing the formation of her exploratory committee. During her appearance at the DNC's annual winter meeting on February 21, she said: "I am prepared to breach the last barrier, shatter the last great glass ceiling that limits the contributions a woman can make in the leadership of this country."



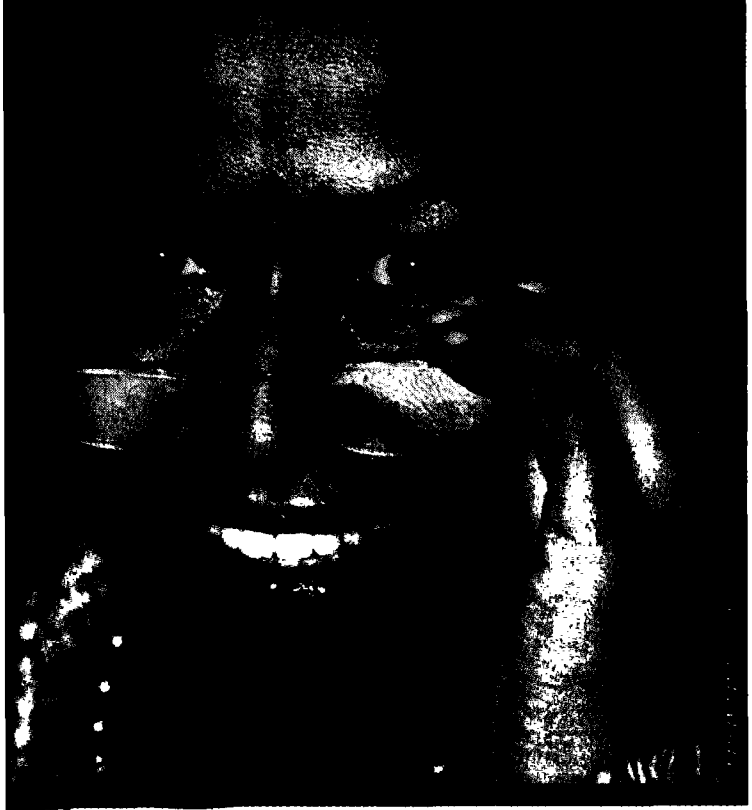
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This is nothing new for the 55-year-old Chicagoan: Gender politics have been very good to her. She became the first black woman ever elected to the Senate in 1992, the "year of the woman." In a three-way primary race, she defeated incumbent Democratic Sen. Alan Dixon and wealthy candidate Al Hofeld partly by rallying women voters angered by Dixon's support of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

During her six-year term, she had some ups and downs, including widespread criticism for cavorting with Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha. While she fought the good fight on some issues, her tenure was largely undistinguished and seldom sparked much enthusiasm in the black community. By the time she ran again in 1998, she failed to generate enough black support to overcome the lackluster candidacy of Peter Fitzgerald. After her defeat, President Clinton named her ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa.

In her fledgling presidential campaign, Moseley-Braun also has taken a firm stance against invading Iraq. "The unilateral attempt to take military action against Iraq is not in the interest of our long-term security," she said during her University of Chicago speech. "I want to be a voice of hope for people who believe war is not the answer to our domestic security, and budget deficits are not a way to grow this economy." (With that position she joins Sharpton, Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich and Vermont Gov. Howard Dean in the firmly anti-war camp.)

Did Democratic leaders recruit Carol Moseley-Braun to undercut Al Sharpton's presidential campaign?



Moseley-Braun dismisses critics who contend she is running to contain Sharpton as "silly." But those critics have a point. Sharpton's verbal skills and podium poise, honed through years of preaching to disparate audiences, make other Democratic candidates look starchy and stodgy. His articulate grasp of issues and willingness to say risky things will favorably contrast him with the overcautious candidates who parse every poll-tested word. This certainly will increase his appeal among black voters and give him a powerful leg up in primary races, particularly in states like South Carolina, Louisiana and Mississippi, where the black share of the vote in the Democratic primary is higher than in other states.

There's little mystery why some Democrats would be anxious to dilute Sharpton's potential electoral power. Although there's no chance he would ever be nominated, his appeal could garner enough delegates to force the DNC into some uncomfortable concessions. His reputation as a political wild card with no real partisan allegiances (he once endorsed Republican Al D'Amato in a New York Senate race) gives party leaders fits.

Some pundits claim that a possible "Sharpton scenario"—in which the defeated candidate refuses to endorse the winner—is the motivation behind Terry McCauliffe's call for all primary candidates to pledge their support to the party's nominee. Keenly intelligent, Sharpton understands how to leverage the party's fear for more favors. They dare not exclude him from any major event or risk provoking his ever ready sense of outrage.

Moseley-Braun's sudden entry into the fray does suggest she was drafted by higher political powers. She reportedly was considering another Senate run as late as December, according to the *Washington Post*. After meeting with Democratic leadership, however, Moseley-Braun suddenly determined that another Senate campaign "would have been going backward."

David Bositis is the senior researcher of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and one of the most knowledgeable observers of national black politics. He says Brazile is not as anti-Sharpton as many seem to think: "Donna Brazile has told Democrats to get a life about Sharpton, to stop treating him as if he was some kind of exotic species and engage him. She's not just urging Moseley-Braun to run, she's encouraging a lot of black candidates."

Bositis also dismisses fears that Sharpton will have a disruptive effect on Democratic politics. "He's a very gifted speaker, and he's serious about bringing up a lot of issues, especially issues pertaining to racial bias, that should be brought up," he says. Many Democrats, Bositis notes, would prefer to avoid such issues.

Perhaps the presence of both Moseley-Braun and Sharpton in the presidential race is a sign of African-American political maturity. Even if Moseley-Braun was drafted to cripple Sharpton's advance, her campaign is an overall victory for the African-American community. After all, why should there be but one candidate for an electorate with a multitude of interests? ■

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Malpractice Myths

Debunking the latest push for 'medical liability reform'

By Kip Sullivan

In the first two months of the year, physicians staged highly publicized walkouts in West Virginia and New Jersey over sharply rising premiums for malpractice insurance. The American Medical Association claims we have a "medical liability crisis" on our hands, and the solution is legislation limiting the amount of money juries can give malpractice victims. President Bush, ever eager to do the bidding of the nation's upper classes, announced during his State of the Union address that malpractice suits are "one of the prime causes" of medical inflation and that he would ask Congress to enact "medical liability reform."

For the third time in the past three decades, the insurance industry has provoked a debate about the malpractice system by dramatically raising liability premiums. The first crisis occurred in the mid-'70s, the second in the mid-'80s. Both followed the same pattern: The AMA and its conservative political allies blamed the premium increases on greedy patients, greedy lawyers and gullible juries; the media duly reported the AMA's diagnosis and downplayed evidence that undermined the "lawsuits are to blame" thesis; and politicians passed laws making it harder for malpractice victims to win compensation for their injuries. The current debate looks to be more of the same. But before Congress and state legislatures give in to the AMA's demands, they should familiarize themselves with a few little-known facts.

First, the nation's malpractice system is definitely not a "prime cause" of health care inflation. That statement will surprise most Americans. According to polling data, a majority of Americans think malpractice litigation is a leading cause of health care inflation. However, that reflects the omnipresence of AMA and insurance industry propaganda, not reality. The total cost of malpractice litigation comes to no more than 2 to 3 percent of the total national health care bill. (About half of this is attributable to the premiums doctors and hospitals pay; the other half is the cost of "defensive medicine," the unnecessary services doctors order to protect themselves against lawsuits.)

Even the most fervent critics of malpractice lawsuits don't allege that all of the costs associated with malpractice litigation can be eliminated with "reform." They argue that only a small fraction of the 2 to 3 percent in total costs can be eliminated. How small? Ten years ago, when the AMA and another president named Bush were promoting malpractice "reform," an AMA-backed coalition called the National Medical Liability Reform Coalition estimated their proposal would save $4 billion if it were in effect by 1994. That's a lot of money, but it's peanuts compared to total spending on health care. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that $4 billion was an accurate measure of the cost of frivolous lawsuits and excessive jury awards in 1994, that amount was still just four-tenths of 1 percent of the $940 billion the United States spent on health care that year.

The second fact Congress must understand is that a prime cause of high malpractice premiums is the high rate of malpractice. Although enormous sums have been spent promoting the notion that liability premiums are too high (they may well be) and lawyers and greedy patients are to blame, much less has been spent determining how widespread malpractice is.

The number of studies measuring the prevalence of malpractice is no more than half a dozen. The best known of these is the Harvard Medical Practice Study, which examined the records of patients hospitalized in New York in 1984 and was published as a series of articles in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 1991. The study found that 4 percent of patients suffered an "adverse event" while hospitalized, and that one-fourth of these injuries were caused by negligence. In other words, 1 percent of hospitalized patients were harmed by malpractice.

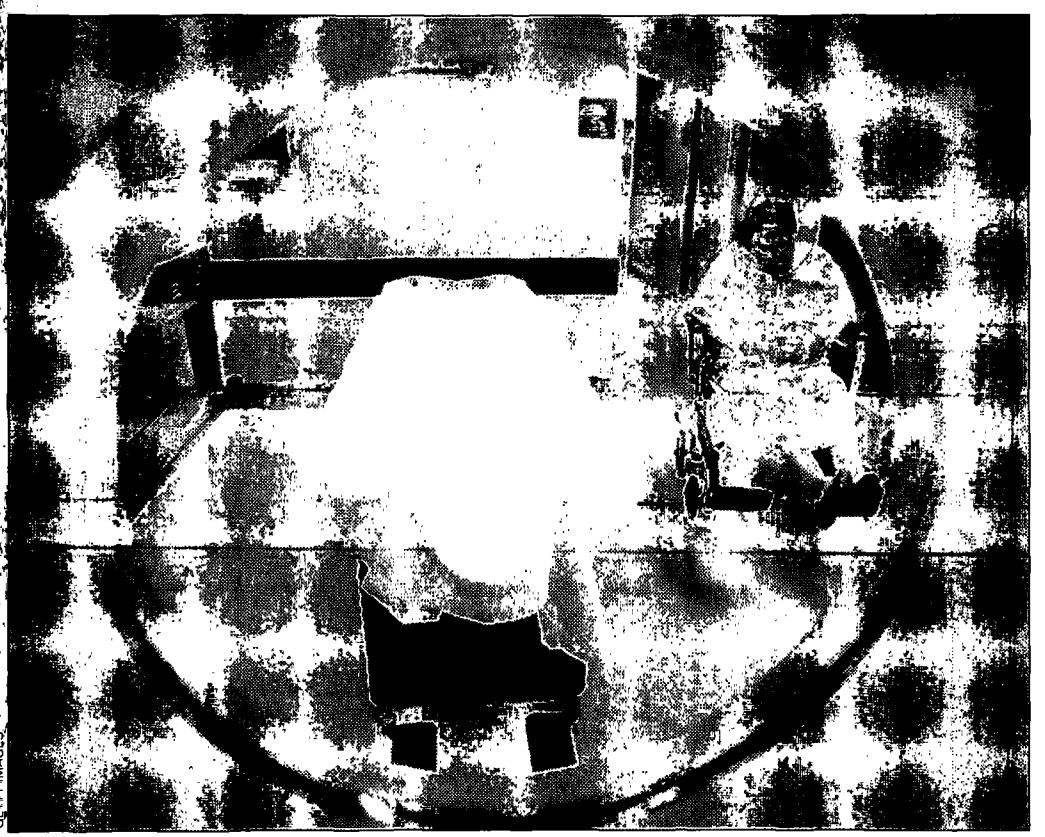
These results were recently confirmed by a study of patients hospitalized in Utah and Colorado in 1992. The study, which appeared in *The Indiana Law Review* in 2000, found that 3 percent of patients had suffered an adverse event, and 30 percent of these cases—or 1 percent of patients—resulted from malpractice. Based on these findings, one can estimate that around 1 million Americans per year suffer adverse events while hospitalized, about 300,000 of them caused by negligence. (Keep in mind that these figures reflect only malpractice in in-patient hospital settings. No rigorous research has been conducted on malpractice outside of hospitals.)

The two studies differed on the percentage of malpractice victims who died from their injuries. The Harvard study said 25

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percent died, but the Colorado-Utah study found that 9 percent died. Either figure represents an unacceptably high death toll. The annual death total nationwide, if the Colorado-Utah study is right, is more than 25,000; the Harvard results would raise that number to 75,000. To put these numbers in context, consider that 30,000 Americans die annually from gunshot injuries, and 43,000 die each year from traffic accidents.

The third and most important fact Congress should get straight is that the vast majority of malpractice victims don't sue. According to the Harvard study, just 1.5 percent of the patients identified as a victim of malpractice filed a lawsuit. In the Colorado-Utah study, only 2.5 percent of malpractice victims did so. (The authors of these studies didn't report how many of the 2 percent actually won compensation for their injuries.) This conclusion is consistent with an earlier study of hospitalized California patients, which reported that the number of adverse events caused by physician negligence was 10 times the number of malpractice claims filed against doctors, and that only 4 percent of the malpractice victims received compensation. As the authors of the Harvard study put it: "There is no basis for the charge that the amount of malpractice litigation is excessive. On the contrary, there seems to be a major 'deficit' of litigation."



GETTY IMAGES

The real problem isn't greedy lawyers or gullible juries. It's bad doctors.

These three facts—malpractice suits constitute a tiny fraction of all health care costs, malpractice is widespread, and just 2 percent of malpractice victims sue—get very little attention from the media. By contrast, the media have lavished attention on the argument that the rising cost of liability insurance in some states was caused exclusively by litigious patients and irresponsibly generous juries. "Everybody is suing, it seems like," says the president.

Total, inflation-adjusted payouts by malpractice insurers for jury awards and settlements did rise by about 20 percent from 1999 to 2001 (after holding steady from 1992 to 1999). Does this prove that lawsuits are the problem? By no means. First of all, data from the first nine months of 2002 indicate a drop in payouts to the 1999 level. Second, a surge in the amount and severity of malpractice may well have contributed to the apparently temporary increase in payouts.

Third, according to critics ranging from Public Citizen to the *Wall Street Journal*, bad business decisions by liability insurers played a significant role in the recent increase in premiums. The *Journal* concluded that malpractice insurance was a "very lucrative specialty" in the mid-'90s, but became less so when the stock market declined and insurers kept their premiums artificially low for a few years trying to steal market share from each other. According to this thesis, the recent premium increases were due in large part to the insurance industry's need to recoup losses caused by the tumbling stock market and industry price wars. The CEO of a "leading malpractice insurer in California" even told the *Journal*: "I don't like to hear insurance-company executives say it's the tort system—it's self-inflicted."

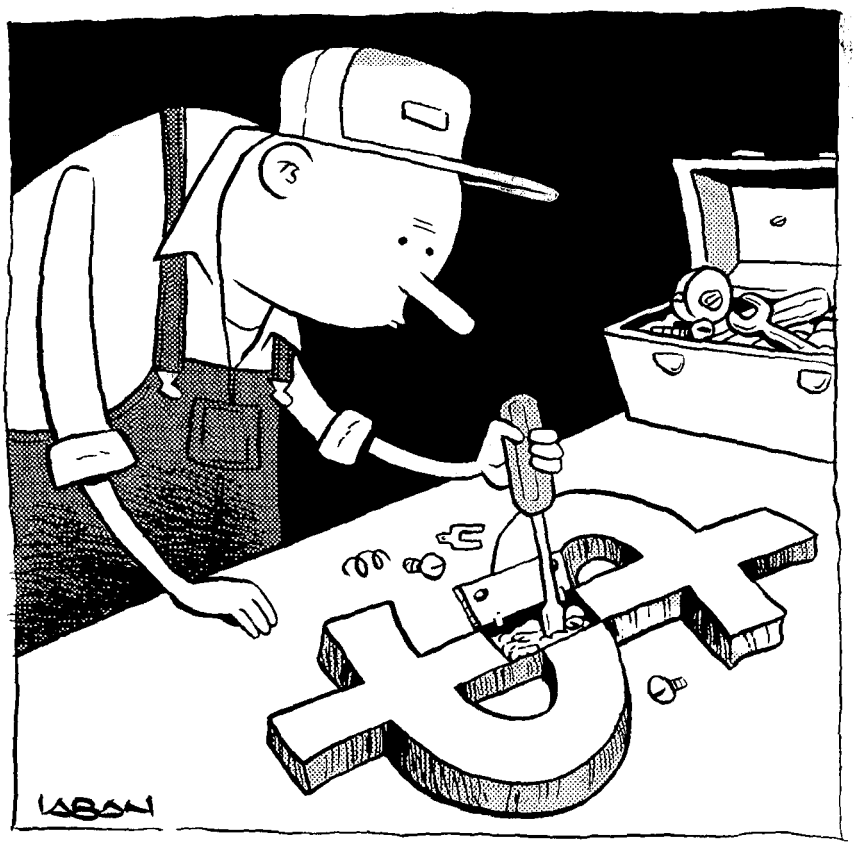
The Bush-AMA proposal to cap jury awards for "pain and suffering" at $250,000 would do nothing to address the real issues. Widespread malpractice is the fundamental problem. The most effective way to reduce malpractice costs would be to reduce the rate of bad outcomes from medical treatment. That will require action on numerous fronts, including restoring the cuts in hospital nursing staffs that occurred during the '80s and '90s under the onslaught of managed care, giving patients the right to sue HMOs, computerizing the prescribing of drugs, and a much greater effort by the medical profession to retrain, or remove the licenses of, bad doctors. ■

Kip Sullivan *writes frequently about health policy.*

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The start of a new egalitarian politics might be found where you least expect it

By G. William Domhoff



Playing the Market

Most Americans have believed since the founding of the country that there should be equality, fairness and opportunity for everyone who lives here. American activists have achieved many of their goals through a wide variety of social and political movements, ranging from the New Deal to the civil rights, feminist, environmental, living wage and anti-sweatshop movements.

Average Americans have won these advances against great odds. The economic and political systems mostly operate in favor of the powers that be, giving in to the pressures and rationalizations of the wealthy few and their corporations. Since 1980, these tendencies in favor of the rich and powerful have gotten completely out of hand, generating excesses that haven't been seen since the fabled Gilded Age of the 1890s. A small percentage of people are doing very well, but most are just struggling to stay even or keep from going under.

The United States is increasingly dominated by a corporate-conservative coalition that is rooted in the ownership and control of large corporations, banks and agribusinesses—which are closely coordinated by shared directors, lawyers and management consultants, even as they compete for profits in the marketplace. This coalition maintains a near-monopoly on respectable expert opinion, which ranges from the mildly liberal to the highly conservative and never questions the fact that the top 1 percent of Americans own almost half of the country's marketable assets.

None of this means the corporate-conservative coalition has complete and total power, or that its success in each new policy conflict is a foregone conclusion. However, the opposing liberal-labor coalition seldom wins more than a few minor concessions and is extremely difficult to hold together because its members have divergent and sometimes clashing interests, which even leads some of them to side with the Republicans on a few issues. It has far less money to spend on political campaigns than the corporate-conservatives. The liberal-labor coalition also has great difficulty assembling a political majority within the electorate because of the long-standing racial and religious divisions that continue to matter deeply in American life. For all these reasons, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, the right to organize, and the right to vote matter much less than they otherwise would.

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Power is best thought of as running along a dimension that shapes all human interactions and social structures, with egalitarians at one end and dominators at the other. Egalitarians are those who want to minimize arbitrary authority and hierarchy, and who believe that everyone should be accorded the same opportunity and respect in the political, economic, legal and personal realms of life. They deny that some individuals or groups are better than others, although they recognize that some individuals (but not groups) have unusual gifts for activities like art, athletics, music or scientific research. Dominators, on the other hand, think there are inherent inequalities among individuals and groups that justifiably lead to extreme hierarchy and social stratification.

An egalitarian-domination dimension, rather than a liberal-conservative one, better captures the values and energy of those inside and outside of electoral politics who have been the force for liberal and progressive changes. Egalitarians are the people who have been feminists, union organizers, socialists, communists, strong environmentalists, civil rights activists, and gay and lesbian activists as well as elected liberals. Egalitarianism is the underlying value system that animates all of these groups—though they differ greatly among themselves in the policies and strategies they embrace to realize their values. In particular, egalitarians have often clashed with liberals (now called "reformers" by those egalitarians who self-identify as "radicals") even though both camps are on the same side of the fence.

Egalitarians have always stood for trying to achieve what liberals timidly support, moderates fear is impossible, and elitists actively oppose. Thanks to their moral indignation and prodigious energy, they have been the catalysts for change even when the movements they supported eventually settled for far less than they wanted. Today, all the pieces are there for a strong egalitarian movement. But they have not been used effectively for two reasons. First, they have not been linked by an underlying rationale that shows activists how they all fit together. Second, they have been obscured and distorted by the inclusion of self-defeating methods that should not be part of the picture.

Any thought of creating a detailed utopian vision can only fail, as many historical attempts decisively show. However, it is possible to establish the key principles on which the economic system should operate, and then develop and fight for the programs that implement those principles in specific areas—like health care or working conditions or unemployment insurance—that could make great improvements in millions of lives. But a plausible vision for a better economic future is precisely what egalitarians have been totally lacking since the collapse of socialism as a believable alternative.

By the '80s, it had become clear that a centrally planned economy wouldn't work very well, even after considerable industrial development and decades of experience with planning. This failure cannot be attributed to a lack of democracy, as some theorists now argue. The problems are economic and sociological, not political. The general failure of a centrally planned economy is a major turning point in the egalitarian project, because it calls socialism into question as the way to realize egalitarian values.

Why is it so hard for many activists to let go of the unworkable idea of central planning as the key to a more egalitarian social system? First of all, the market reduces all human relationships to an individualistic "cash nexus," to quote Marx, which is nearly the opposite of the collective human values implied by "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs." Then, too, the impersonal market is a snare and a delusion, because it is the most pernicious method ever devised to legitimate the exploitation of labor.

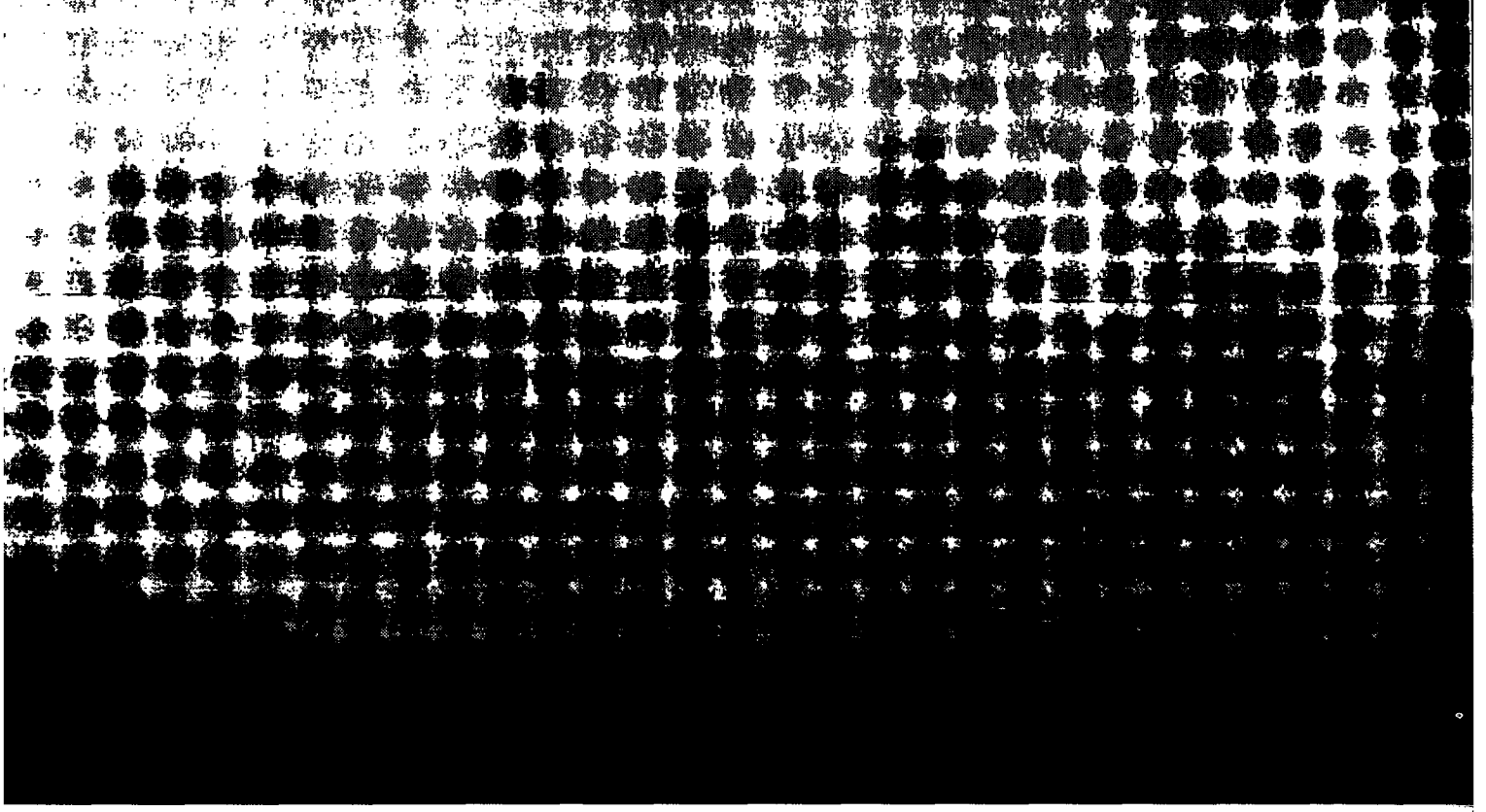
But central planning does not work economically and has strong authoritarian tendencies built into it that do not promote freedom. First, it fails because no one has been able to design methods to analyze the tremendous amount of information necessary to manage a large-scale centrally planned economy that goes beyond a few core industries. Furthermore, the large bureaucratic system created to try to obtain and utilize this information becomes completely inefficient and corrupt in the way many such large organizations often do.

Any thought of creating a detailed utopian vision can only fail. However, it is possible to establish the key principles on which the economic system should operate, and then implement those principles in specific areas that could make great improvements in millions of lives.

If central planning is a disaster and markets are primarily instruments for exploitation, no wonder egalitarian activists have been unable to project the necessary vision of a better future that would provide renewed energy for their work. Understandably, they simply say the current system is not good enough—but do not offer any alternatives. However, there is more hope than most egalitarians realize.

The idolization of the market as a perfect, self-regulating mechanism that always leads to the best possible outcomes is as far from reality as the hopes of socialist central planners. The claims by free market ideologues that any laws regulating the market hinder productivity, or that greater economic equality inevitably limits freedom, are without significant empiri-

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If environmentalists prevailed, the United States could clean up the air and create jobs at the same time.

cal support. Research shows that markets need guidance from government to operate well, and that there is no inevitable trade-off between equality and efficiency, or between equality and freedom, within a market system. More equality might even mean more efficiency, and it certainly means more freedom for more people.

Most importantly, markets can be reconstructed to make it possible to plan for a more egalitarian economic future. Strong governments can use the market system for planning. Once markets are viewed as administrative instruments for planning, they can serve collective purposes as well as the individual consumer preferences trumpeted by conservatives. There is thus no need for one big planning apparatus. Instead, the planning tools within a reconstructed market system are simply taxes, subsidies, government purchases and regulation. These powers can be potent when applied to markets.

In this light, the annual battle over energy policy in Congress can be seen as an exercise in planning through the market, and as a prototype for the kind of policy struggles that could be waged on other issues. Environmentalists call for higher taxes on fossil fuels, subsidies for renewable energy sources, and regulations that force automobile manufactures and utilities to burn fuels more efficiently and cleanly; they ask the government to purchase heating and cooling systems for its buildings that use renewable energy and to use vehicles that meet the highest standards of fuel efficiency. On the other hand, the oil, coal, automobile and utility companies demand low taxes, subsidies for fossil fuels and minimal regulations relating to efficiency or pollution.

Planning through the market is, in effect, the general strategy adopted by the environmental movement, and it has paid good dividends. Although most environmental programs actually increase the number of jobs, the plans developed by environmentalists call for the government to subsidize any job losses of sudden dislocations through "just transition" programs. For example, one plan developed to cut carbon dioxide emissions in half by 2020, put forward by economists James Barrett and J. Andrew Hoerner, includes a proposal for two years of income and up to four years of education for those who lose their jobs, along with $10,000 in community funds for each job lost. At the same time, their plan to tax carbon and increase the use of renewable energy sources would increase the overall number of jobs. "Just transitions" would be financed by everyone through their taxes—a collective solution to a collective problem.

If the environmentalists' plans were to prevail, the United States could gradually wean itself from foreign oil and clean up the air and water at the same time. According to this new way of thinking about planning, then, the big issue is winning political power from the corporate-conservative coalition, which is another reason why challenges in the electoral arena are such an important dimension of a full-scale egalitarian movement within a democratic society. Taxes, subsidies, government purchases, and regulations could be used by egalitarians to do planning through the market if they had enough power in the government. The economic issues are not all that arcane. The solutions are there. But the political power has been sorely lacking.

Once markets are accepted as a necessity for the production and distribution of most products and services, it is possible to really hone in on the areas where they don't work the way politically conservative free market economists say they do. Here, there is much support from moderate and liberal economists. Even the most extreme free marketers, the libertarians, admit there are "market failures." Important issues in social life where the market cannot get values right can also be used as a battering ram against the anti-government ideology of low taxes employed by the corporate-conservative coalition to stifle government spending for the social services everyone needs and wants.

For example, the whole area of health care is a "market failure." People don't have the time or expertise to shop around

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when they are sick, so it is difficult to have much "consumer choice." No one could possibly save enough to pay for the care needed during a catastrophic illness. Not just anyone can deliver health care, so there are "barriers to entry." Most of all, of course, health care providers cannot make a profit if they have to treat people who cannot pay, which means they would have to let such people sicken or die instead of helping them. The result in the United States is an inefficient private insurance system with a bigger bureaucracy than the government would have if all the bills were paid by Medicare.

By drawing on the experience of other democratic capitalist countries, it is also possible to show convincingly that a reconstructed market system could be much more open and flexible than the current U.S. model. For example, many different types of enterprises could compete in the market, not just privately owned corporations. It is possible to conceive of a fully functioning market system based on consumer-owned cooperatives, or state-owned firms, or a combination of cooperative, state-owned and private companies. At the least, government agencies could own companies that enter into highly concentrated markets and provide competition. In essence, this is what the New Deal did when it created the Tennessee Valley Authority to produce electricity and fertilizer for the underdeveloped areas along the Tennessee River. The price-gouging utilities controlled by holding companies in New York protested mightily; but the southern Democrats saw them as Yankee exploiters, and that was the end of it.

Needless to say, a reconstructed market would not put an end to the wage system, so it would not satisfy those influenced by classical Marxist theory. But planning through the market could be used to decrease the degree of exploitation that currently exists by making wages higher, work more humane and employment a political right. Better unemployment benefits and guaranteed health insurance would also reduce exploitation through the wage system. Within this context, those who decry the alienation created by markets should think about the fact that a majority of Americans express satisfaction with their jobs even under present conditions. This suggests they would find them even more positive in a reconstructed market system with genuine protections for working people.

The heresy for egalitarians is to admit that markets can have the virtue of being a decentralized form of coordination and control that does expand opportunity for most people. Yes, they can also make it possible for the owners of income-producing private property to gain the power to dominate government. But by their very nature they leave open the possibility that government can limit the power and rewards of ownership through taxes, subsidies, government purchases and regulation. Government can also create competitive public enterprises to compete with privately owned companies and tax incomes and wealth far more than it is doing now, without disturbing the functioning of the market.

On balance, then, markets are more useful than not and can provide a starting point for developing new egalitarian policies and programs. It therefore makes sense to talk about reconstructing the "market system" and figuring out ways to democratize it. It makes sense to think about Congress setting out general plans for energy conservation and health care, and to develop separate agencies to carry out these plans. The models here are the Social Security Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. Only right-wingers live in dread of such agencies, which could serve people even better if they were backed by higher budgets and an egalitarian majority in Congress.

Pessimism is no more warranted than belief in inevitable victory. No one would have imagined that a New Deal would emerge out of the Republican '20s and the Great Depression, or that a moribund union movement could be revived at the same time through a combination of liberal legislation and courageous activism by rank-and-file leaders. Neither did anyone expect that a militant new civil rights movement would emerge from black churches and traditionally black universities in the early '60s.

As these examples show, change can start tomorrow or 50 years from now. New opportunities to create positive social changes are arising all the time. The cracks and fissures in the powers that be were exploited in the past and could be exploited again. ■

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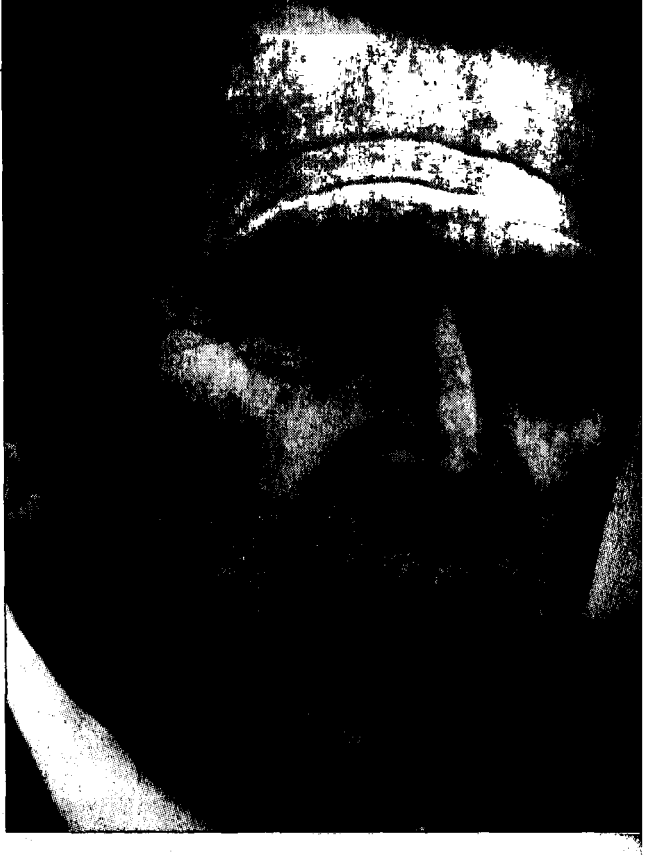
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Catastrophes Real and Imagined



By Slavoj Žižek

In *Minority Report*, the Steven Spielberg film based on a Philip K. Dick story, three humans, through monstrous scientific experiments, have acquired the capacity to foresee the future. The police employ these clairvoyants to arrest criminals *before* they commit their crime. (The "minority report" from the title refers to those rare cases where one of these clairvoyants disagrees with the others about a crime to be committed.) If one transposes this premise to international relations, does one not get an accurate picture of the Bush (or, rather, Cheney) doctrine now publicly declared as the official U.S. "philosophy" of international politics?

As detailed in the 35-page paper, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," issued by the White House on September 20, the doctrine's main points are: 1) American military power should remain "beyond challenge" in the foreseeable future; 2) since the main enemy today is an "irrational" fundamentalist who, in contrast to the communists, lacks even the elementary sense of survival and respect for his own people, America has the right to "pre-emptive" strikes; 3) while the United States should seek ad hoc international coalitions for such attacks, it reserves the right to act independently without international support.

So while the United States presents its domination over other sovereign states as grounded in a benevolent paternalism that takes into account the interests of other states, it reserves for itself the ultimate right to *define* its allies' "true" interests. Even the pretense of a neutral international law is abandoned, since, when the Americans perceive a potential threat, they formally ask their allies to support them. But the allies' agreement is optional; the underlying message is always, "We will do it with or without you." You are free to agree, but not free to disagree. The Bush doctrine reproduces the old paradox of the forced choice: the freedom to make a choice on condition that one makes the right choice.

The United States was displeased with Gerhard Schröder last September, when he won re-election largely thanks to his firm stance against the American military intervention in Iraq, because he did what a normal politician in a functioning democracy and a leader of a sovereign state would do. He agreed that the Iraqi regime is a threat, but he disagreed with the way the U.S. government proposed to deal with that threat—thereby stating an opinion shared not only by majorities in Germany and many other states, but also by a considerable percentage of the American people and Congress. Schröder's skepticism was a real-life "minority report" signaling his disagreement with the way others saw the future—and thus he was the first to get the full taste of the Bush doctrine.

We all remember the MAD ("mutually assured destruction") logic elaborated at the height of the Cold War. From our retrospective view, the MAD logic cannot but appear relatively rational today. Back in the '70s, the American nuclear strategist Bernard Brodie pointed out how this logic effectively functioned. In short, MAD worked not because it was perfect, but on account of its very imperfection. The perfect strategy (if one side nukes the other, the other will automatically respond, and both sides will thus be destroyed) had a fatal flaw: What if the attacking side counts on the fact that, even after its first strike, the opponent continues to act as a rational agent? His choice is now: With his country mostly destroyed, he can either strike back, thus causing total catastrophe, the end of humanity, or *not strike back*, thus enabling the survival of humanity and at least the possibility of a later revival of his own country. A rational agent would choose the second option.

But what makes MAD efficient is the very fact that we cannot ever be sure that it will work perfectly. What if a situation spirals out of control for a variety of easily imaginable reasons (from the "irrational" aggressiveness of a stray general to simple technological failures or miscommunications)? Because of this permanent threat, neither side wants to come too close to the prospect of MAD, so they avoid even conventional war. If the strategy were perfect, it would, on the other hand, endorse the attitude of "Let's fight a full conventional war, since we both know that no side will risk the fateful step towards a nuclear strike!" The actual constellation of MAD is not, "If we follow the MAD strategy, the nuclear catastrophe will not take

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place," but, "If we follow the MAD strategy, the nuclear catastrophe will not take place, except for some unforseen incident."

The problem with today's Bush doctrine is that it leaves no room for the "realistic" possibility of chance or the unforseen that sustained the MAD doctrine. The Bush doctrine instead relies on the violent assertion of the paranoiac logic of total control over some *future* threat, and pre-emptively strikes against it. Such an approach in today's universe is patently inept. The loop between the present and the future is closed: The prospect of a breathtaking terrorist act is evoked in order to justify incessant preemptive strikes now. The state in which we now live, in the "war on terror," is one of the endlessly suspended terrorist threat: The catastrophe is taken for granted, yet endlessly postponed—whatever will actually happen, even if it will be much more horrible than 9/11, will not yet be *that*. The true catastrophe *already* is this life under the shadow of the permanent threat of catastrophe.

Terry Eagleton recently drew attention to two opposed modes of tragedy. The first is the big, spectacular catastrophic event, the abrupt irruption from some other world; the second, the dreary persistence of a hopeless condition, the blighted existence that goes on indefinitely, life as one long emergency. This is the difference between the big First World catastrophes like 9/11 and the dreary permanent catastrophe of, say, Palestinians in the West Bank. The first mode of tragedy, the figure against the "normal" background, is characteristic of the First World, while in much of the Third World, catastrophe designates the all-present background itself.

And this is how 9/11 effectively functioned: As a catastrophic figure that made us, in the West, aware of the blissful background of our happiness, *and* of the necessity to defend it against the foreigners' onslaught. It followed Chesterton's principle of conditional joy: To the question "Why this catastrophe? Why couldn't we be happy all the time?" the answer is "And why should we be happy all the remaining time?" September 11 served as a proof that we are happy and that others *envy* us this happiness.



In the war on terror, imminent catastrophe is taken for granted yet endlessly postponed. The loop between the present and the future is closed.



Along these lines, one should risk the thesis that, far from jolting the United States from its ideological sleep, 9/11 was used as a sedative enabling the hegemonic ideology to "renormalize" itself. The period after the Vietnam War was one long trauma for the hegemonic ideology—it had to defend itself against critical doubts, the gnawing worms were continuously at work and couldn't be simply suppressed, every "return to innocence" was immediately experienced as a fake ... until 9/11, when the United States was a victim and thus allowed to reassert the innocence of its mission. Far from awakening us, 9/11 served to put us to sleep again, to continue our dream after the nightmare of past decades.

The ultimate irony here is that to restore the innocence of American patriotism, the conservative U.S. establishment mobilized the key ingredient of the politically correct ideology that it officially despises: the logic of victimization. Relying on the idea that authority is conferred (only) on those who speak from the position of the *victim*, it reasoned: "We are now victims, and it is this fact that legitimizes us to speak and act from the position of authority." So today, when we hear the refrain that the liberal dream of the '90s is over, that, with the attacks on New York and Washington, we were violently thrown back into the real world, that the easy intellectual games are over, we should remember that such a call to confront harsh reality is ideology at its purest. Today's "America, awaken!" is a distant call of Hitler's "*Deutschland, erwache!*" which, as Adorno wrote long ago, meant its exact opposite. ■

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Dream On

By Cedric Kwesi Johnson

Freedom Dreams marks a significant intellectual turning point for Robin D. G. Kelley—"a kind of crossroads." In the opening pages, he expresses his alienation from "the same old protest politics." His stated purpose in *Freedom Dreams* is to recover the visions of social transformation advanced by black radical movements.

Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination
By Robin D.G. Kelley
Beacon Press
248 pages, $24

For a born-again Kelley, the path to liberation will not be found in the dog-eared pages of the organizer's manual, but rather in the apocalyptic visions of revolution touted by the black power era, Revolutionary Action Movement, the poetry of Ted Joans, the literature of Martinican anti-colonial activists Suzanne and Aimé Césaire and the surrealist, Afro-Cuban paintings of Wilfredo Lam. Kelley writes: "Without new visions we don't know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical but we forget that making revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics but a process that can and must transform us." Again and again in his heartfelt introduction, he urges the need to refocus on the imagination.

Over the past decade, Kelley has established himself as one of the most well-known and widely read black historians. Against the grain of pedestrian accounts of black history fixated on charismatic elites, Kelley's intellectual focus on the black working class is refreshing. His precocious debut *Hammer and Hoe* (1990) narrated the neglected history of black communists in Jim Crow-era Alabama. His subsequent essay collections, *Race Rebels* (1994) and *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!* (1997), offered wide-ranging, perceptive critiques of popular misconceptions of black working-class culture.

Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! took direct aim at the underclass myth, self-help ideology and their implications for American social provision. Its straw man criticisms of the "enlightenment left" notwithstanding, *Yo' Mama* was an important intervention into the post-welfare public debate presented in an accessible language and engaging style. Like the works of Linda Faye Williams, Michael Katz, Adolph Reed Jr., Barbara Ehrenreich and Stephen Steinberg, among others, *Yo' Mama* exorcises the neoconservative demonization of the urban poor. *Freedom Dreams* breaks with that style of political engagement, however.



CARMINE GALASSO/THE RECORD/KRT

***The Jungle* by Wilfredo Lam, 1943.**

Readers of his latest book will be rewarded by Kelley's discussion of the cross-fertilization of revolutionary ideals over the Atlantic, from Caribbean anti-colonial struggles to the metropolitan art circles of mid-20th-century Paris. Kelley's celebration of "the marvelous" is not new; intellectuals from Andre Bréton to Herbert Marcuse have championed the liberatory power of the imagination. But the political implications of Kelley's intellectual epiphany are problematic.

By focusing primarily on political ideals, he sidesteps the troublesome issues of strategy and political practice. This interpretative bias is a logical extension of the tendency within neo-Gramscian cultural studies to assign equal weight to the expressive and material dimensions of politics. Hence, the daily acts of resistance on Southern plantations, wearing Zoot suits or cornrow hairstyles and the improvisational genius of John Coltrane or the Roots are seen as comparable to—and for some, more significant than—purposive political actions like staging a union drive, canvassing neighborhoods during an election or demonstrating in front of city hall to protest pending budget cuts. While I certainly do not wish to downplay the importance of consciousness or everyday forms of resistance, cultural opposition is no surrogate for direct political engagement.

Yet Kelley's opening act of contrition shuns the task of organizing—of effectively combining radical vision with creative modes of political mobilization. This dismissive posture toward hard politics is unsettling. Kelley sees searching for the sources of movement failure as an

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unproductive venture. Curiously, he concludes that all historical radical movements were essentially failures, "because the basic power relations they sought to change remained pretty much intact." Perhaps part of Kelley's disenchantment with organizing stems from this overly cynical view of power and political change.

This fatalistic view of politics is partially descended from '60s radicalism. Angst over the threat of co-optation within the ranks of black power radicals and the wider New Left led to an anti-statist orientation and, eventually, down various avenues of disengagement. Under the belief that authentic opposition is corrupted by engagement with governmental and corporate institutions, many activists deserted practical mobilizations around concrete policy aims for cultural politics, ideological fetishism and hermetic, alternative lifestyles.

Taken to its extreme, fears regarding co-optation suggest that the pursuit of constructive political action is futile. Consequentially, the theme of flight—both physical and political—runs deep through the pages of *Freedom Dreams*. Kelley praises the antebellum maroon settlements established by escaped slaves, the 19th-century repatriation schemes of Bishop Henry M. Turner and others, Marcus Garvey's para-colonial designs, and the millenarian expectations of black power radicals and contemporary reparations activists.

To his credit, Kelley notes the limitations of these various social movements—particularly, the patriarchal and elite-inflections of some black nationalism. However, he holds that these problems do not completely tarnish the broader emancipatory visions of these radical projects. Kelley writes: "I'm not suggesting that we wholly embrace their ideas or strategies as the foundation for new movements; on the contrary, my main point is that we must tap the well of our own collective imaginations, that we do what earlier generations have done: dream." Despite this disclaimer, his attempts to neatly separate the idealism of historical movements from their political efficacy diminishes this work's critical edge.

Inasmuch as *Freedom Dreams* treats the historical unfolding of black radical movements as a seamless narrative of fallen heroes who valiantly challenged a faceless political hegemon, it reads the contingency out of that history and ultimately fails to capture the distinctively human character and fallibility of both the opposition and entrenched elites alike. This approach cannot revitalize critical interpretation of society—past or present—nor can it effectively guide the political practice of those who desire a freer, more meaningful existence than that available under late capitalism.

Wearing a cornrow hairstyle and listening to the Roots is no substitute for the real political work of environmental groups, labor unions and civil rights organizations.

Freedom Dreams' exclusive focus on the millenarian hopes of various black radicalisms marks a hasty retreat from rigorous social critique and toward political resignation. Never is this more apparent than in Kelley's vindication of the contemporary reparations campaign. Although he rightly dismisses the morally reprehensible and opportunistic broadsides against reparations penned by neoconservatives like Dinesh D'Souza, Kelley's defense suspends critical judgment of the glaring problems with the reparations argument.

Instead, he rehearses the questionable comparisons commonly drawn by pro-reparations advocates between their contemporary demands and the historical—but certainly not legal—precedents of monetary compensation to Holocaust survivors and Japanese citizens detained by the U.S. government during World War II. In his references to the racial "we," Kelley embraces the flawed notion that blacks form a cohesive political body. This assumption corsets the reparations demand, discourages careful consideration of constituencies as they exist within the "black community," and avoids the nettlesome strategic questions that should accompany any serious attempt at political mobilization.

Indeed, Kelley looks for revolution in the wrong places. Despite their path-breaking attempts, the Revolutionary Action Movement remained marginal and largely unknown among the main of black working people during the '60s. Likewise, the respective programs of the Communist Labor Party, the Revolutionary Communist League, the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Workers Party had little resonance beyond the amen corners of the American left. The logic of sectarianism always leads away from developing the kind of cosmopolitan social movements capable of transforming society. With some exceptions, those political movements that succeeded at various turns in building popular, multiracial support and in transforming the legal and institutional basis of inequality do not figure prominently in Kelley's treatise on the radical imagination.

Labor unions, environmental groups, tenants organizations, free speech, civil rights, anti-war and poor peoples' movements are not panaceas by any stretch, and have seldom been immune from the white supremacy and paternalism that has often characterized broader society. Nonetheless, the abolition of slavery, universal suffrage, the eight-hour work day, the minimum wage, child labor laws, federal enforcement of civil rights, occupational safety laws, consumer protection standards, the expansion of a social safety net under the New Deal and Great Society legislation all evolved because of public pressures from below. While the effects of such policies were not always felt evenly across racial lines, these measures enhanced the lives of many Americans. Though incomplete, these progressive policies and the social movements that produced them insured the "freedom to dream" for many in our society.

In the midst of today's neoconservative wilderness, it is not surprising that Kelley turns to the imagination. As Marcuse noted at the closing of the equally repressive, politically barren '50s, "The aesthetic dimension still retains a freedom of expression which

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enables the writer and artist to call men and things by their name—to name the otherwise unnameable."

Artists from Bertolt Brecht and Octavia Butler to Terry Gilliam and Outkast have often provided us with the most inspirational and poignant critiques of society. Their wordcraft and images reveal the absurdity of the militarism, hierarchy and exploitation all too often rationalized by market doctrines and the state. Yet at a moment when "trickle-down" economics, the privatization of social programs, the expansion of federal surveillance capacities and the doctrine of pre-emptive warfare have attained novel legitimacy, dreams alone are not enough. ■

Cedric Kwesi Johnson *is a professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. He also serves on the planning committee for the Rochester Labor Lyceum.*

Pieces of Africa

By Jeremy O'Kasick

He had awoken to a journalist's dream assignment. In August 1998, British author and book critic Giles Foden journeyed to the tropical isles of Zanzibar off the East African coast to write for a travel magazine.

Unified with mainland Tanzania, the semi-autonomous state had recently become a growing tourist haven and had long inspired exotic tales from Western explorers and writers. But while Foden followed that legacy, touring the Islamic island's white sand beaches, al-Qaeda terrorists bombed the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. For a moment, a so-called paradise was lost.

After Foden heard the news, he immediately went to Dar es Salaam to witness the aftermath. In Kenya, 213 people, almost all Africans, lost their lives; in Tanzania there were 11 additional fatalities. East Africa's extreme shock coupled with the relative unconcern in the United States disturbed and inspired Foden. A vision of his next novel soon became clear.

Zanzibar
By Giles Foden
Faber and Faber (U.K.)
390 pages, £14.99

Jump forward a little more than three years and a month to September 2001. Foden had all but finished his seventh and final draft of *Zanzibar*, a fictionalized account of events surrounding the Dar es Salaam bombing. His film agent happened to be pitching the book's rights to production companies in New York City on the 11th. Then and there, the next bomb dropped. "After September 11, I had to live up to the immense narrative power of the news media, where the truth is always in question. Unlike some other media, fiction can hold arguments in suspension and give a truth that is somewhere in between extremes," says the 35-year-old author.

With similar aim, his award-winning first novel, *The Last King of Scotland*, chronicled the murderous reign of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin through the perspective of his Scottish physician. As Foden's third historical novel set in Africa, *Zanzibar* sought to explore issues of neocolonialism, U.S.-dominated geopolitics and Islam in Africa. Although he did not dramatically alter the content or perspective of *Zanzibar* after 9/11, a year would pass before it appeared in British bookstores. It received positive appraisal overall from critics and readers, and promised to do well in the United States too. It had all the drama of a Hollywood thriller, with a realistic account of how Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda agents lived and operated years before they had consumed the popular consciousness.

U.S. publishers, however, were less than enthusiastic to take on a novel with a graphic depiction of a terrorist bombing and criticism of U.S. security and foreign policy. To this day, American readers can only find *Zanzibar* overseas or online. Knopf-Vintage Books, which published Foden's two previous novels in the United States, hasn't touched *Zanzibar* yet, though it is still reportedly considering it. For more than a year, Foden has been approaching several other publishers as well. As Foden explains it, one of them told him that "they just weren't ready for this as entertainment yet." (In terms of how publishers value novels, that comment may say it all.)

"It's not a question of censorship," continues Foden, who also works as the deputy books editor at the *Guardian* in London. "An orthodoxy just takes hold across the global media, and it's like what Chomsky calls 'manufactured consent.' Some publishers are just too nervous to go against the orthodoxy on these hot issues."

Zanzibar follows a long tradition of British international thrillers, from Graham Greene to John le Carré, weaving together four storylines from some of the genre's usual suspects.

> **"It's not a question of censorship," says Foden, "an orthodoxy just takes hold across the global media. ... Some publishers are just too nervous."**

Nick Karolides is an adventurous American marine biologist who joins a USAID mission in Zanzibar. His female counterpart, Miranda Powers, receives her first diplomatic post as an executive assistant of security at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam. Needless to say, East Africa's two innocent newcomers soon spark a romantic intrigue and later fall into the terrorists' web.

For a novel that at first unravels as slowly as the East African pace of life, and whose primary climax is known before page one, Foden keeps the reader going with in-depth detail of terrorist operations and the workings of U.S. intelligence and security. Yet the novel's

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***Zanzibar*, Giles Foden's novel about the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa, came out in Britain last year, but so far U.S. publishing houses have been skittish—perhaps because of the human face it puts on Islamic terrorism.**

true strength, which may have also deterred skittish stateside publishers, lies with the two characters who transcend their character types.

Khaled al-Khidr, a young Zanzibari, turns to Islamic fundamentalism and joins al-Qaeda after his parents are ruthlessly murdered. With repeated flashbacks, the narrative tracks Khaled through the Afghan desert, where he receives his training and even meets the long-bearded "Sheikh" himself, and then back to his native Zanzibar, where he and other al-Qaeda members plot the embassy attack. The callow perspective of a rising terrorist is balanced by that of a fallen hero, grizzled CIA veteran Jack Queller, whose closet holds as many ghosts as empty whisky bottles. Queller is quick to criticize U.S. security and foreign policy flaws, as he spotted the coming of the terrorist tide before it even got rolling.

Through Khaled, Foden gives terrorism a human face, in this case, of an African Muslim manipulated by outside fundamentalist forces. Foden based Khaled on the real-life Zanzibari terrorist Khalfan Kamis Mohammed, whom a federal court in New York City sentenced to life in prison in October 2001 for his role in the 1998 bombing. Foden characterizes the terrorist's narrow worldview with a series of terse, passive sentences: "He was confused. The world was confused also. Only the pain was the same. That was the fate of all human beings. Only those who were believers could escape it. And among the believers, only those who undertook *jihad* were guaranteed a place in paradise. The thought of it frightened him."

Yet Khaled's spiritual profundity shines through in Foden's evocative description: "Khaled stood barefoot on the white, wrack-strewn shore, stood on the gleaming, purring sand looking out to sea. Even though the waves came with some regularity, the foam broke into patterns that were slightly different each time. This seemed a very holy thing to him, as if each wave were craving admission to that perfection comprehended by Allah alone."

Not exactly your typical CNN-broadcasted confessions from the terrorist mind.

Given the superstory arching over *Zanzibar*, it is easy to forget that, at its heart, this is a novel about Africa in the era of globalization. Foden moved from England to Africa when he was 5 years old, as his father worked as an agricultural economist for the United Nations. For the 20 or so years, he grew up between Britain and various African countries, including Tanzania.

Foden, who has written extensively about Africa and African literature, shies away from professing his love for the continent, an attitude that he categorizes as rather colonial and loaded with primitivist associations. Indeed, his devotion to challenging Western readers' views of African life remains undeterred. Toward the end of *Zanzibar*, Queller reflects on the meaning of the 1998 bombings for Africans: "There was innocence in every place, but here among the African poor, whose vicissitudes were so much greater, it glowed starbright. The continent had its own intense griefs and did not deserve the griefs of others."

The grief in East Africa, whether provoked externally or fostered internally, continues to grow. On November 28, an Israeli-owned hotel was bombed in Mombasa, Kenya, killing 13 people. Nearby, an Israeli airliner in takeoff narrowly avoided two shoulder-fired missiles. Two of the three hotel suicide bombers were fugitive terrorists indicted for the 1998 bombings. Other al-Qaeda fugitives are still at large.

The State Department has since issued a travel warning for all of East Africa, alerting Americans to continuing terrorist threats, including bombings and kidnappings. To the woe of these impoverished nations economically dependent on tourism, many travel companies have suspended their operations in locations such as Zanzibar and the East African coast.

"Partly, the book came out of this rage about how little value is placed on African life as opposed to a European or American life," Foden says. "It's also about these characters' illusions of adventure and Africa. It's true that so many young people go to Africa hoping for adventure. I was one of them. I have lost some of the romantic illusions. But it's a place that sticks with you." ■

Jeremy O'Kasick *is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer who recently lived in Dar es Salaam as a Fulbright Scholar.*

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Into the Woods

By Joshua Rothkopf

When people complain about the movies being too fake or showy or otherwise lacking in depth, I have to wonder if they really want the pain. It's pretty intense.

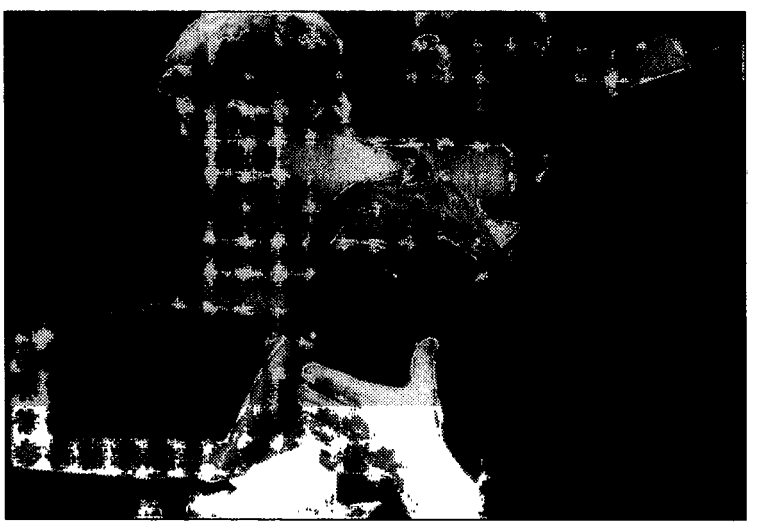
The Son
Written and directed by
Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Characters that are distressingly human: vulnerable, confused, with only their routine jobs and an uncertain grace to work for. A central drama that is intimate yet socially and politically relevant, perhaps upsettingly so. And an ending that signals not resolution but the posing of difficult ethical questions that fully intend to chase you back home and to work the next day.

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have made that film. Actually, they've made it three times now. *The Son*, like the Belgian brothers' previous features *Rosetta* and *La Promesse*, burrows deep into the anxieties of a working-class protagonist ("hero" would be plain wrong) without even a hint of sensationalism—or even a musical score—to help us along. This time, though, the Dardennes have added an expressly spiritual dimension to the mix; the allegorical plot follows a modern-day carpenter forging an uneasy relationship with a young, possibly undeserving apprentice.

The Dardennes build drama slowly and deliberately, often perching their handheld cameras right at their subjects' earlobes or on the backs of their necks. It's an odd choice, but one that works improbably well in achieving intimacy; it's how we first meet Olivier (Olivier Gourmet), balding and squeezed into his workman's leather corset. We pursue him as he paces though his domain, a vocational school's woodshop, stopping here to inspect a student's template, there to dislodge a plank from a dangerously shrieking tablesaw. The nice long take establishes both Olivier's command—the authority that comes from years of working with tools—and an uncommonly meticulous depiction of a place of work. (The brothers made documentaries for 20 years before turning to narratives.)

From these purposeful beginnings grounded in the comforting precision of woodworking, mysterious clues begin to accrue. A secretary enters and asks Olivier if he has room for another student. Inspecting the candidate's record, he declines her request but secretly follows her back to her office and watches a young hand signing an enrollment form.



NEW YORKER FILMS

Workplace tension: Morgan Marinne and Olivier Gourmet in *The Son*.

Later that evening, a smiling woman shows up at Olivier's neat apartment. They speak casually from obvious past intimacy, and we soon learn she's his ex-wife; she's getting remarried and is pregnant. Back at work, he continues spying on the new student (Morgan Marinne), a blond teen-ager assigned to the metal shop, and suddenly seems to change his mind. Entering the locker room silently, he observes the boy, asleep on a bench. After a moment, he bangs on the locker and tells him he'll take him on.

It all feels a little unseemly, these first 20 minutes of stalking and tense instruction: how to unfold a ruler, how to oil it. You wonder if Olivier's strange behavior is somehow related to his ex-wife's new happiness, or worse. But then, with a single shocking line of dialogue, the Dardennes turn their film on its head and everything becomes movingly clear. It's a revelation impossible not to discuss for the purposes of this review, and the key to *The Son*'s undeniable power. If you're already convinced, you may want to read no further.

The teen's name is Francis; he spent five years in prison for murdering Olivier's son—a tragedy that led to the ruination of the marriage. On a dime, all of the taut exchanges and wary silences are filled with pain as *The Son* leaps to a level of philosophical inquiry rarely seen in the cinema. The Dardennes, as if waiting for the moment, suddenly rotate their cameras around to Olivier's face, capturing his subtlest reactions to the boy's every unintentionally hurtful word. (Gourmet is a marvel in the part.) Is he trying to reclaim some sense of the son he lost or plotting his revenge? This is filmmaking at its most precarious: the mechanics of suspense yoked to exquisitely moral ends.

Lessons in carpentry take on the weight of parables as his attentions shift from fatherly to menacing and back again; the Dardennes never settle. Olivier teaches Francis about fine grains of wood, seethes as he pilots his car while Francis slumbers obliviously in the front seat, slams on the breaks flinging him forward. The Dardennes never demonize Olivier, a good man distracted by dark thoughts, nor do they sanctify Francis, whose surly aloofness would make him a problem case even without his past. "Who do you think you are?" screams the ex-wife, confronting Olivier in a parking lot, on to his little project. He can't say, and in deference to that honesty I won't either. But identifying with Olivier shouldn't be difficult for those who suspect that living with evil, rehabilitating it, is harder than vanquishing it, and a path of virtue. Can there be a more timely movie? ■

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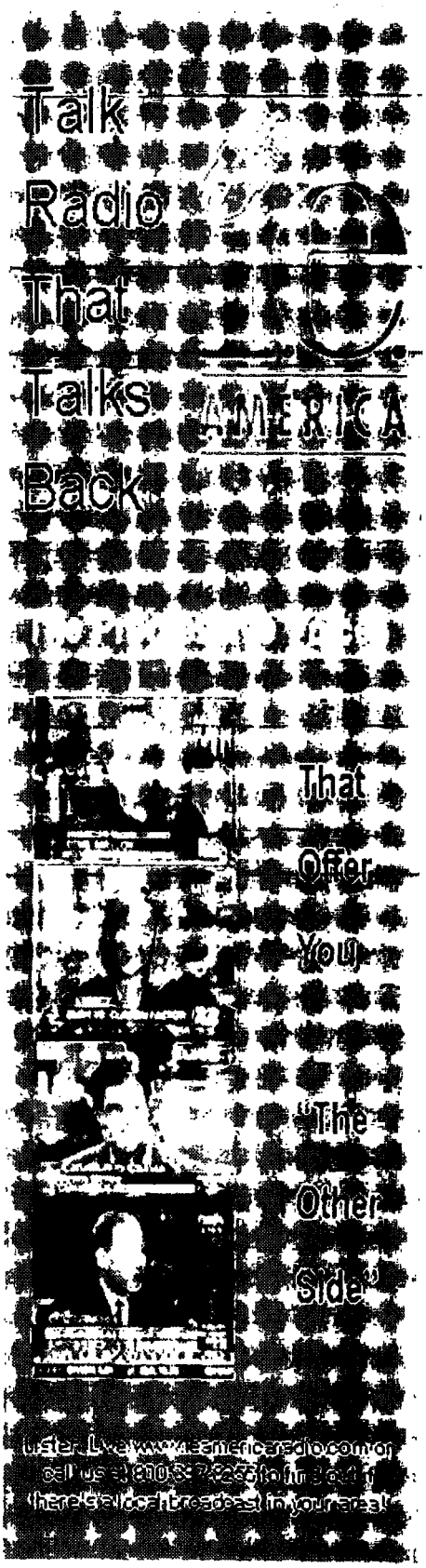
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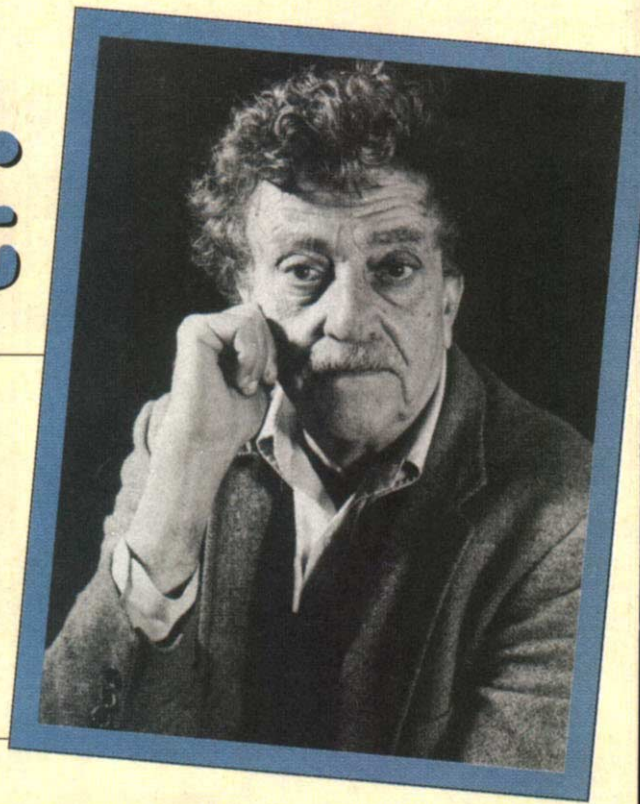
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Dear Mr. Vonnegut



The recent Kurt Vonnegut interview ("Kurt Vonnegut vs. !&#@," February 17, 2003) has become the most popular story at inthesetimes.com, with hundreds of readers expressing their opinions in the "comment" section. The interview has also been translated and reprinted in* Aftonbladet, *Sweden's largest daily newspaper, and* La Jornada, *Mexico's most respected daily newspaper. In light of this response, Vonnegut has agreed, on an occasional basis, to entertain readers' questions. If you would like to submit a question, write to vonnegut@inthesetimes.com, and we'll pass along your question to him.*

What genuinely motivates al-Qaeda to kill and self-destruct? The president says, "They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other," which surely is not what has been learned from the captives being held in Guantanamo, or what he is told in his briefings. Why do the communications industry and our elected politicians allow Bush to get away with such nonsense? And how can there ever be peace, and even trust in our leaders, if the American people aren't told the truth?

Peter Hoyt, Little Deer Island, Maine

Dear Mr. Hoyt,

One wishes that those who have taken over our federal government, and hence the world, by means of a Mickey Mouse coup d'etat, and who have disconnected all the burglar alarms prescribed by the Constitution, which is to say the House and Senate and the Supreme Court and We the People, were truly Christian. But as William Shakespeare told us long ago, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

And what remains the best-kept secret from the Second World War, because it is so embarrassing, is that Hitler was a Christian, and that his swastika was a Christian cross made of axes, an apt symbol of a political party for Christians of the working class. And there were simpler, unambiguous crosses on all Hitler's tanks and planes.

Again: One wishes, for the sake of the whole planet, that the people in and around the White House nowadays truly mean it when they say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," and that they respect as children of God the losers, the nobodies so loved by Jesus in the Beatitudes, in His Sermon on the Mount: the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, the merciful, the peace makers and so on.

But such is obviously not the case. George W. Bush smirks and gloats unmercifully as he boasts of his readiness to loose more than a hundred cruise missiles, what I call "Timothy McVeighs," into the midst of the general population of Iraq, nearly half of whom are children, little boys and girls under the age of 15.

His domestic policies, whose viciousness is peewee in comparison with what he is so eager to do to foreigners who don't look like him and talk like him, who don't have names like his, nonetheless inflict pain on those Americans of the sort enumerated in the Beatitudes, by depriving them of decent health care and educations, and of food, shelter and clothing when times are bad. It seems quite possible that his opinion of the American people has been formed while watching the *Jerry Springer Show*, which is Republican propaganda of the most pernicious kind.

But America was certainly hated all around the world long before this coup d'etat. And we weren't hated, as George W. Bush would have it, because of our liberty and justice for all. We are hated because our corporations have been the principal deliverers and imposers of new technologies and economic schemes that have wrecked the self-respect, the cultures of men, women and children in so many other societies.

It's that simple.

What are we to do when confronted by such hatred? Respond to Code Red and run around like chickens with their heads cut off.

Keep in touch,
Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut released the following statement at the February 15 anti-war demonstration in Bangkok:

"Those Americans determined to make war on Iraq, a tyranny already quite effectively neutered by the United Nations, and one which has never threatened us, intend to divert us and themselves from America's local and immediate problems, which are profoundly disturbing, with a truly thrilling TV show."

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